

## Understanding and promoting H2020 and other EU programmes

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## Introduction and context

The Pacific region has growing geostrategic importance ('an emerging foreign policy priority') for the EU [European Commission (2012). JOIN]. Improved regionalism in the Pacific in the last decade has advanced intraregional cooperation, particularly on economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security. The potential of international co-operation for the region has long been acknowledged even when it was at 'a very premature stage' [Sanyal; 1991. (p6)]. Indeed EU-Pacific cooperation specifically 'has a long history', with one recent independent evaluation of such links referring back to the Lome Convention (1975) with ACP states [ADE; ITAD; COWI; 2015.(pi)]. Taking advantage of anow improved climate for cooperation, as well as greater internationalisation both in higher education and R&D generally, the European Commission's current strategy for the Pacific focuses on a limited set of specific priorities: governance, regionalism and sustainable management of natural resources [European Commission (2012). JOIN]; [Serger, S.; Remoe, S. [EC. 2013].

EU research and innovation policy, notably supported through the Framework Programmes (FP) for Research and Innovation, has a particular role to play in this renewed EU-Pacific strategy, most particularly by contributing to building research capacity, in both regions, whether directed at the Pacific region's specific development challenges or mutually shared ones. (A priority of the Framework Programmes was to contribute to this common purpose 'the overriding aim of FP7 was to develop a knowledge-based society and economy'.) [High Level Expert Group; 2015. (p47)]

INCO-NETs are policy-oriented projects, funded under the FP as a part of the EU's international cooperation strategy for S&T. They aim to support bi-regional policy dialogues to promote the participation of third countries in the activities of the FP, to promote regional integration and the prioritisation of common research areas of mutual interest and benefit, and to monitor the performance and impact of international ST&I cooperation across the Programme. An evaluation of FP7's international cooperation refers to the 'comprehensive nature' of the coordination and support of INCO activity and its 'contribution to emerging common research priorities' [Farrell, M.; 2015 (p9)]. The joint approach is itself valued, as R&I cooperation 'with third countries through the FP7 international cooperation activities offered several advantages over similar initiatives taken unilaterally' [Farrell, (p54)]. An earlier Interim Evaluation of FP7's international cooperation meanwhile had also referred to the identification of 'common research topics' as one of the programme's 'most tangible and immediate' results, though elsewhere it also acknowledges the challenges represented by 'a broad target region and heterogeneity of the partner countries' [Warrington, B.; Ricci, A.; 2011. p29, 31]. INCO-NETs typically have a mix of activities for promoting bi-regional partnership both in terms of policy and practical cooperation.

At the broadest level, the PACE-Net Plus INCO-NET project serves the renewed and multi-dimensional Pacific-EU partnership [EC (2006). EU relations with the Pacific Islands]. It provides a specific platform for fostering EU-Pacific (EU-PAC) scientific and technological research and innovation partnerships on the one hand, and on the other for advancing policy level dialogue on ST&I cooperation between the regions. The EU's first 'fully-fledged strategy' gives a context for this cooperation referring to the value of focusing on 'a limited set of specific priorities, where the Pacific

has significant needs for which Europe has indisputable comparative advantages’. [EC (2006).EU relations]

### ***Report: its aim and structure***

The purpose of this brief report is primarily to collate some accumulated experience in promoting EU-PAC ST&I partnerships, to articulate the lessons learned, and to formulate recommendations both for PACE-Net Plus partners and more generally for the policy makers and programme owners in the design of future cooperation programmes. The original analysis (June 2015) is here supplemented by further evidence from a brief survey of those involved in PACE-Net Plus (undertaken in July 2016), with additional context drawn from published work from a range of countries on such cooperation and partnerships.

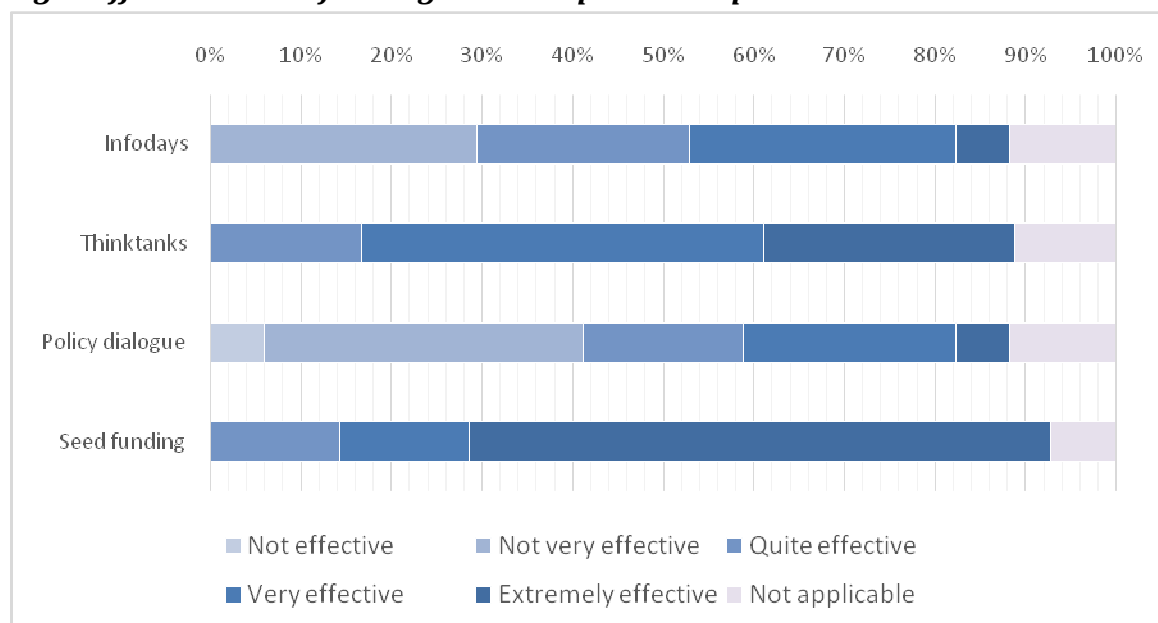
The report builds on a preliminary assessment conducted in 2015 of the networking and partnership mechanisms that have been implemented by PACE-Net Plus for advancing EU-PAC ST&I cooperation. Since no systematic or formal evaluation of such activities has been completed specifically for PACE-Net Plus, though various evaluative reviews have included it in its coverage (e.g. Barlas [(2014)]), this report remains largely anecdotal. It does however, draws on the outputs and outcomes of activities, and makes use of several reports to the EC which analyse and to some extent evaluate the FP7 INCO programme and other INCO-NETs. Specifically for this revised version of the report, 26 representatives of 15 partner organisations involved in PACE-Net Plus were invited to provide their feedback on the mechanisms that had been implemented, as well as other approaches that could be considered for future partnership building. 18 people from 13 institutions responded to the survey.

## **Mechanisms used by PACE-Net Plus to date for promoting EU-PAC partnerships**

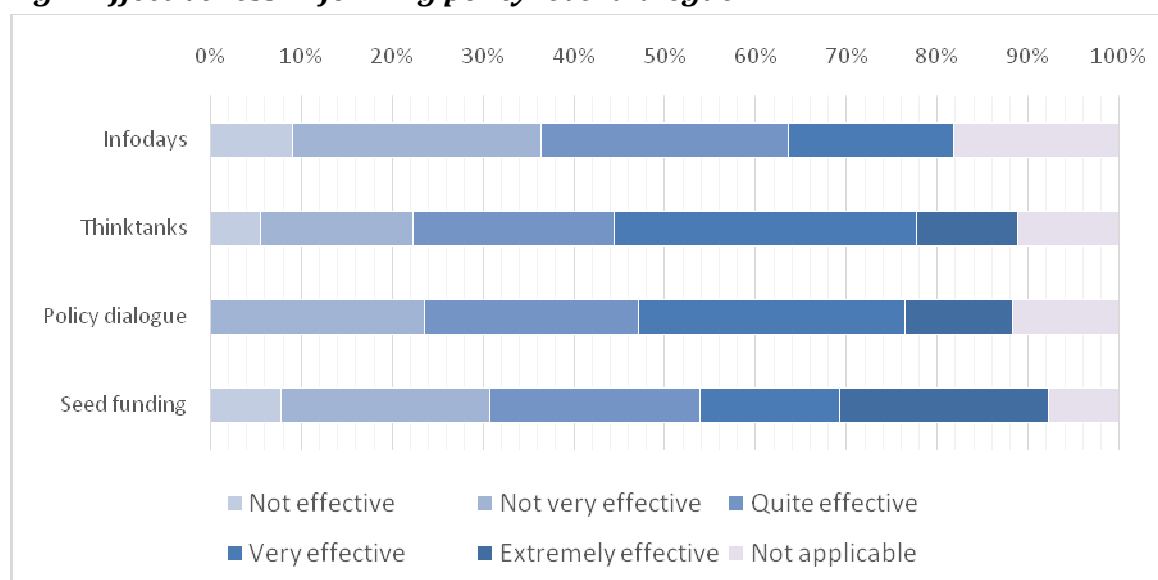
### **Overall partner feedback**

Partners were asked to provide their views on each of the mechanisms, or approaches, used in the PACE-Net Plus project, even where they weren’t directly involved in its implementation. Feedback was given on the mechanisms’ effectiveness in forming research partnerships or in promoting dialogue between the EU and Pacific stakeholders (Figs 1 & 2)

**Fig 1. Effectiveness in forming research partnerships**



**Fig 2. Effectiveness in forming policy level dialogue**



Based on this evidence, seed funding followed by think tanks were seen as the most effective mechanisms to form research partnerships (it is worth noting that often the delivery of these two mechanisms were linked), while information days and policy dialogue platforms had a more mixed response (Fig 1).

It was less clear which approaches were seen as most effective in fostering EU-PAC bi-regional relationships, given the mixed responses received, but think tanks and policy dialogues perhaps had the most positive responses overall.

The following sections will consider the effectiveness of each of these ways of building partnerships within this project. For each, the preliminary assessment from 2015 is presented. This is then

reflected on in a following section, referring to and incorporating the views of partners collected in the 2016 survey.

## **Information sessions on the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation**

Information sessions in third countries / partner regions about the EU's Framework Programme have been a core activity of PACE-Net Plus and of many INCO-NETs, addressing the common objective of fostering greater use of the Framework Programme for supporting bi-regional research and innovation partnerships around topics of mutual interest. A summary of the first six INCO-NET projects which were developed for other regions lists 'awareness and dissemination' among their roles [EC; 2008. INCO-NET Projects (p5)], while the Interim Evaluation of the Capacities Programme cites information sessions as one of their 'fundamental activities' [Warrington, B.; Ricci, A.; 2011 (p58)]. The changing focus of the INCO-NETs and how information about them was disseminated was also addressed by the later Capacities Programme evaluation. 'While most of the early INCO-NETs had a generic approach, a number of them had already touched upon some of the societal challenges in some way ... in the later projects the societal challenges were fully integrated into the design of the projects, which focused on selected challenges'. [Farrell; 2015 (p58)]

PACE-Net Plus conducted a number of Horizon 2020 information sessions in various countries during the course of the project.

Broadly, information sessions follow a similar formula, ideally adapted to the interests and context of the audience. Seen as a relatively straightforward way to encourage cooperation, information sessions can generate significant participant interest, not least because of the impressive statistics associated with the Framework Programme. There are however, some potential risks and considerations to take into account for making the best use of information sessions in advancing bi-regional cooperation.

INCO-NETs in developing regions particularly note that information sessions may lead to significant dissatisfaction due to unrealistic expectations of the Framework Programme, which may ultimately be counterproductive. Notably, where cooperation priorities in third countries / regions focus on a development agenda, and where research and innovation capacity is a limiting factor for cooperation, it is development initiatives that may have greater resonance with national objectives. Researchers and national authorities in third countries may have greater familiarity with such work, and if the FP is presumed to support development cooperation more directly this can lead to frustration when the criteria for FP participation are spelled out. This reflects the somewhat contradictory position in which INCO-NETs can find themselves as they seek to foster research and innovation partnerships in countries where investment in development objectives may take precedence over pure research.

For the Pacific region in particular PACE-Net Plus partners note the disparity in access to H2020 between the researchers in PICTS, in New Zealand and in Australia. The reality is that ineligibility of researchers from New Zealand and Australia for most FP funding causes frustration and hinders EU-PAC partnerships. While some researchers in New Zealand and Australia may be able to access local funds, such as competitive grants, to support researcher participation in FP projects, this is not

always the case. Moreover, pressure in national institutions for example (such as NZ's Crown Research Institutes) for researchers to cover full costs means that, even where there is access to FP funds, the absence of fully funded overheads raises the barriers and the frustration.

The relative infrequency of some of the information sessions and the range of countries they are intended to address, and particularly in being alert to their 'varying levels of development', was acknowledged in the earlier Interim Review [Warrington, B.; Ricci, A.; 2011 (p59)].

The wider issue of circulating information effectively and so anticipating the expectations raised, often features in analyses of, and guides to, such international collaboration. An evaluation of a major philanthropic partnership for African HE (PHEA) refers to the need to set 'clear goals and expectations', and the difficulty if there was uncertainty as to 'what the goals meant in terms of practical steps to take' [Parker, 2010 (p37).] At another level an analysis of partnerships between universities internationally refers to 'the relatively few opportunities for networking and sharing information about the characteristics of partnerships, their outcomes and ways of addressing challenges' [Smail, 2015 (p10)]

Avoiding misinterpretations and unrealistic expectations demands carefully tailored information sessions that acknowledge the specific interests and perspectives of the audience, particularly in developing nations. (Sensitivity to different contexts and ways of seeing, recur in other recommendations to effective partnerships; a recent ACE review of standards and practice in international HE partnerships, for example, states that 'broadly the standards stipulate that the cultural contexts of all parties should be taken into account at all stages' [Helms, R. (ACE), 2015 (p21)]). The Framework Programme is large and complex. Specialist knowledge of its content and rules, experience of participation in it, and detailed awareness of regional interests, are important pre-requisites for educating third country researchers about the FP and optimizing their use as a means of advancing cooperation.

Data on Horizon 2020 calls points to a reduction in third country participation relative to FP7, an outcome that has caused concern at the European Commission [EC, Horizon 2020 Statistics]. The reduction seems to partially reflect what is being perceived as a reduction in the number of opportunities for participation by third countries in Horizon 2020. The change in status of China, Brazil, India and Russia is also a legitimate contributory factor in the reduced third country participation. Contrary to the perception of reduced opportunities, Horizon 2020 is presented by the EC as the most internationally open of the EU's Framework Programmes yet. While this may indeed be true, the increase in European focus in the topics has the effect of excluding third country researchers, and an increase in specifically European targeted topics, fuels the perception of a reduction in opportunities, since it becomes far more challenging for them to justify their involvement. (Direct comparison, however, between the beginning of Horizon 2020 and the end of FP7 is not necessarily 'meaningful' [Moedas, C. (EP Parliamentary Questions) 2/10/15].)

With this in mind, information sessions need to be presented in a manner sensitive to expectations and perhaps adjust the standard approach of emphasis on targeted openings (i.e. collaborative projects with required participation and ring-fenced budgets) to one that looks at the opportunities for more general, mainstream participation. [EC Horizon 2020; 2016, p11] For developing country participation, the latter is particularly important since it is by focusing interest in this way that developing countries have had the greatest success in the past.

It is not only INCO-NETs that have conducted FP information sessions. BILAT projects (aimed at bilateral relationships), third country NCPs at the national level, and the NCP networks, have also conducted information sessions. PACE-Net Plus has supported cooperation with different projects, institutions and networks in the region as a way to share responsibility for raising awareness of the FP.

The role of NCPs is to promote the FP, so they are arguably better informed and trained to promote the FP and other R&I cooperation instruments than partners in INCO projects. However, some INCO-NETs, such as PACE-Net Plus, include partners in their consortia with experience of acting as NCPs to assist in meeting that particular objective. From a practical perspective, for projects such as PACE-Net Plus, where a large distance separates the two regions, and where substantial competence exists among NCPs in the region, notably those in New Zealand and Australia, an argument exists for the role of FP awareness raising to be conducted through cooperation between partners and the NCPs based in the region, perhaps drawing also on thematic projects in the region.

**Recommendation:** For maximising impact and minimising unrealistic expectations, information sessions should be conducted by experienced and knowledgeable partners, and always contextualised for the circumstances relevant to the target region / country.

### ***Partner survey feedback on Information Sessions***

The 2016 survey of partners involved in PACE-Net Plus largely supported the feedback and recommendations made, with concerns over the accessibility of funding for Pacific partners and recommendations that events should be targeted and tailored to different objectives and coordinated. There were also mixed views on their effectiveness as a mechanism used in isolation for facilitating partnerships.

Information sessions were seen as valuable for enhancing Pacific participation in H2020 through sharing information and tools. However, partners highlighted that these events, by their nature, were more geared towards sharing information, rather than interactive approaches that could better facilitate partnerships. The focus on research funding also made information sessions of less interest for policy makers or those outside of academia.

There were mixed opinions on whether the information sessions should be targeted towards those with no prior knowledge of H2020, or should focus on those already aware and able to engage with EU processes. Reinforcing views expressed in the 2015 report, partners suggested that NCPs, as networks already aware of H2020 funding requirements, may be best placed to facilitate information sessions. Partners also reiterated the challenge for developing country stakeholders to access and make use of H2020 funding, proposing that other sources of funding may need to be considered, that the capacity and proposal writing skills of partners would need to be strengthened in order for them to be able to engage and that a broader programme of awareness raising and institutional change may be needed in order for a wider cultural shift towards research and research funding mechanisms. For some funding, it was suggested, it was beyond the institutional capacity of many developing country institutions to either meet the selection criteria, or to have the skills to navigate the funding system. (Some advice on managing Horizon 2020 projects notes, similarly, that



‘financial management of projects is still complex and often underestimated by Project coordinators’.) [Jansen, W. et al; Technopolis; 2015 (point 9)]The invitation of participants to these events should therefore give consideration to this. The following comment reflects some of these concerns and proposes that a more substantial programme of support and awareness raising may be needed to address these issues:

*Europe's interest in and the European Commission's support for the Pacific region is commendable. Striving towards a strengthened bi-regional policy dialogue is a valuable goal to develop ties and relations. Whether programs like H2020 in its present form provides the best means to support this ambitious goal remains to be discussed. Since the significant differences in capacities, infrastructure and academics-researcher numbers are evident, cultural aspects, e.g. the perception of time, would need to better reflect in a specific program aiming at long-term capacity building in the PICTs. The acceptance of science as part of a rationale policy development will need to be improved. This only can occur if leaders and elders become supportive parts of the process. The SDGs provide a framework through which these policy principles can be fostered. Partnerships require a certain degree of compatibility in value systems amongst the partners.*

Recommendations that capacities would need to be built for some partners to be able to engage, suggests that events could be divided into those aiming to introduce EU funding and strengthen partners' capacity to access it, and sessions to give further information to those with some prior knowledge. (The Interim Evaluation report had already noted that 'a number of third country partners remarked that alternative sources of funding (Global Environment Fund, World Bank, Asian Development Bank) are more attractive to prospective beneficiaries than the Framework Programme on account of the administrative burden associated with the latter'. [Warrington, 2010; p31]). In addition to the research focus of information sessions, partners highlighted how their location determined the level of participation and it was suggested that events held alongside other workshops or conferences facilitated better attendance. Partners proposed that the potential for information sessions to encourage partnerships to form could be enhanced by linking them to a thematic area of focus and, as already noted, better tailoring them to the needs and interests of participants. To facilitate networking, more interactive sessions could also be included. One respondent suggested that infodays could be linked to workshops focusing on meeting certain societal challenges or scientific topics:

*In my view, linking the infodays with particular workshops focused on certain societal challenges / scientific topics was a good way to meet several objectives - it ensured that stakeholders with similar interests were present that they had developed / discussed concrete projects, and were thus keen to learn about funding opportunities.*

Thematically delivered infodays were seen as better able to support networking and engagement in the content for attendees. However, it was noted that this may be difficult for emerging economies where the size and spread of thematic groups can vary considerably.

In this context an evaluation of the FP (2007-13) noted how it ‘marked a milestone by setting explicit expectations for science to contribute to solving some of the pressing challenges the EU faces today ... For HORIZON 2020 and its successor programmes it will be important to “think big” in focussing on the strategically important and critical challenges and opportunities of our times’ [High Level Expert Group, 2015 (p14, p15)].

Reflecting recommendations already made, partner feedback suggests that greater consideration would need to be given to the focus, format, accessibility and targeting of these events for them to be an effective mechanism for partnerships to form. It also indicates that information days should be considered within the wider context of institutional capacity building to engage in and form partnerships for research funding and may be most effective as part of a broader programme of events tailored to particular needs. Acknowledging contexts for institutional capacity building is a familiar principle from other partnership studies in the HE sector. One ‘Good Practices in Educational Partnerships: Guide’, for instance, restates it with reference to understanding the relevant working and cultural environment, and so the negative impact from ‘the overestimation of capacity or underestimation of time – because of insufficient knowledge of the partner’s working context’ [Wanni, N. et al; 2010 (p38)]. While tailoring information sessions and aligning them to existing events and interests may facilitate better communication, it is also important to note, however, that the main objective of these sessions within PACE-Net Plus was to provide information on H2020. It may therefore be more appropriate that those with knowledge of existing funding calls, as well as the local context, design the timing and delivery of events and tailor the selection process to best align with local needs, capacities and ongoing research processes.

## **Think tanks for joint research prioritisation**

Many early INCO-NETs included focused research prioritization workshops conducted between researchers and academics from the two regions. These events sought to identify researchable topics of mutual interest that could be offered for consideration to the EU FP, or to other multilateral and even national R&D programmes, for inclusion in future calls for proposals. The workshops suffered from weak links to programme owners and despite high investment, few joint researchable topics identified by the workshops were ever incorporated into calls for proposals. Identifying joint priorities for research however remains among the main roles of INCO-NETs, although not all current INCO-NETs address the objective directly.

Learning from past experience, in PACE-Net Plus thematic Think Tanks (TT) replaced research prioritization workshops. Among those held as part of the project there have been in Bremen, Germany on non-communicable diseases, on resources management and climate change, and on science and traditional knowledge in aqua- and agriculture for sustainable living; in Papeete, Tahiti on infectious diseases; in Noumea, New Caledonia on coastal ecosystems, and on strengthening the observation systems of climate change and its impacts in the Pacific, and in Auckland, New Zealand on mining and sustainable development.

These TT’s have taken a broader approach to building EU-Pacific partnership than that of the research prioritization workshops. In each of the thematic areas, the TT aimed at the same time to identify common interests, to suggest joint activities and initiatives for fostering partnerships, and to formulate recommendations for an emerging EU-PAC policy dialogue. With contributions from a

diverse group and using a strongly participatory approach led by professional moderators, outcomes from the TT included many proposals for scientific collaborations, but at the same time also they also tended towards discussion shared issues, the social and cultural contexts impinging on cooperation, and the values and conditions which could support cooperation.

As the project was developed as part of the EU's FP, a key objective of PACE-Net Plus has been to promote excellence-based research and innovation cooperation around 'societal challenges' under Horizon 2020. Indeed a detailed 'Directory of Research Capabilities in the Pacific' was commissioned to help 'to identify priority cooperation areas and common challenges' and so areas for joint work and innovation [ILM; IRD; 2015]. However, while the TT outputs are genuine expressions of common interests between the regions, not all of these relate directly to the FP. Since PACE-Net Plus promotes cooperation between regions with diverse incomes and capacities for research and innovation, many of the issues that emerged are not necessarily suited for excellence-based R&I cooperation within a project. Instead they involve cooperation at a programme level, to national / sectoral budget support, or to support in other areas of development cooperation. PACE-NET Plus aims to improve inter-regional cooperation overall in the 'societal challenges', and to build a broader based ST&I relationship than one around excellence-based R&I alone. As a result, PACE-Net Plus has a role to play in also supporting research capacity development in the Pacific region and on social and economic issues.

**Recommendation:** It is incumbent on bi-regional support initiatives for optimising cooperation to recognise the divergence of capacities between regions and to promote and mobilise cooperation mechanisms appropriate to the interests of both regions, and for example to look for ways of aligning development and research programming. The representation of the European Development Fund (EDF) at the first meeting of the EU-PAC platform in Auckland and the PACE-Net Plus discussions with the EDF, are important in this regard. The representation of development cooperation instruments from the Pacific region (notably from New Zealand and Australia) in future EU-PAC bi-regional platforms should be considered.

In the broad PACE-Net Plus TT approach, it became evident that what determined positive outcomes in the TT areas was beyond the reach of research and innovation partnerships, policy and programming. In the Bremen discussions on non-communicable disease for example, while many researchable issues around NCDs of common EU-PAC interest were identified, it emerged that poor health outcomes suffered in the Pacific Islands may be the result of particular trade or taxation policies, as well as of social and cultural values that R&I partnerships cannot alone address. The influence of international trade policy on science cooperation is alluded to by Barlas, among others ('trade is a framework condition for innovation') [Barlas, 2014, (p10)]. While public health research can provide evidence for health policy reform, and while scientific and technological research and innovation can provide new drugs and diagnostics, their impact is limited while other policy areas and/or socio-cultural factors operate against them.

Although influencing these contexts is beyond the mandate of PACE-Net Plus, there should be reflection on the extent to which support for R&I cooperation is constrained by its dependence on conditions beyond PACE-Net Plus' control. (See the analyses in 'From Knowledge to Solutions: EU-Africa Research and Innovation Cooperation for Global Challenges' [Cherry, A.; du Toit, D. (eds.); 2016/forthcoming (e.g. 'bi-regional R&I partnerships are not without their politics' (p101))]. The

Interim Review, for instance, also notes with reference to those participating in INCO-NET projects that 'limited progress has been achieved in encouraging these countries to allocate even modest amounts of funding for building capacity in S&T' (Warrington, 2010, p64)). The relationship between R&I and other policy areas and socio-cultural factors is important to understand as it sheds light on the programme's potential reach. (A related issue is, as Barlas notes, the target audience for those involved – 'should they be talking to government policy makers, to non-governmental policy makers (e.g. leaders of scientific institutions), to business leaders, to national funding bodies, or even to researchers themselves? [Barlas, p11]) Perhaps such reflections are relevant for introduction to the bi-regional policy dialogue. Indeed, the Pacific Islands Forum is working towards a statement, in which PACE-Net Plus may play a supporting role, on the importance of science in addressing broader Pacific issues.

Whether contributions from a range of participants are best for addressing PACE-Net Plus objectives remains a subject for discussion. However, what the TT type of activity may deliver, perhaps better than earlier INCO-NET researcher workshops, is a sense of inter-regional priorities for STI, including barriers to positive outcomes, which can be applied to policy dialogue.

One of the greatest weaknesses of the earlier research prioritization workshops was the limited usability of the outcomes. Challenges however also exist in the handling of outputs from PACE-Net Plus TT. While the project should avoid assuming unrealistic responsibility for using and applying their discussions, it is probably reasonable for TT participants to expect the project to have follow-up activity. The call for seed funding targeting TT participants offered precisely such a means of supporting the best ideas.

One of the greatest challenges faced not only by PACE-NET Plus but by all INCO projects is in tracking the outcomes of events such as these TT. The concern has been raised often and as yet, no satisfactory solution has been identified. Temporal separation between cause and effect and barriers to the attribution of causality hinder attempts to track ideas and monitor the follow-up actions of participants in any systematic fashion.

In the BILAT FEAST project all Australian researchers who were involved in FP7 proposals (both successful and unsuccessful) were surveyed to get a sense of how they got to the point of being able to consider a formal project (FEED; FEAST ([http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/92688\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/92688_en.html)); Faletic, R.; Desvignes-Hicks, J-F; 2010) Results point to a long relationship history between the Australian partners and one of the EU counterparts. The vast majority of Australian researchers had either emigrated from Europe, or had spent significant time in Europe as a researcher (PhD training, postdoc, sabbatical, fellowship, etc.). (Over two thirds had spent 'substantial' time in Europe, while almost half had 'prior experience with the EU Framework Programmes' [Faletic, 2010, p3].)

Overall, this points to formal FP projects being simply an extension of existing long-standing collaborative relationships. A small number of respondents to the survey (approximately 10%) though, indicated that they were head-hunted because of their international standing in a specific area of expertise that was required for the project [<http://hdl.handle.net/10440/1255>].

Analyses of other higher education, and particularly research, links show a similar pattern (e.g. 'partnerships are initially based on contracts between individuals, whether senior managers, departmental heads or individual members of staff, who are seen as international enthusiasts'

[Smail, 2015, p9]. An EC study of effective international STI co-operation likewise acknowledged the importance, initially at least, of independent and practical links rather than strategic ones: 'most third country policy makers and most researchers do not think of a specific bilateral STI agreement when they consider seeking cooperation. They, of course, think much more pragmatically' [Fikkers, D.; Horvat, M. 2014 (p36)].

**Recommendation:** To better grasp the value of PACE-Net Plus Think Tanks partners might consider conducting follow-up surveys that aim to determine the extent to which, perhaps after one to two years, participants can attribute any new activity related to EU-PAC collaboration to attendance at PACE-Net Plus Think Tanks.

The Interim Review had argued, similarly, that the use of such monitoring and evaluation as an incentive be 'further discussed with ... INCO-Net participants' [Warrington, 2010 (p31)]. Barlas suggests that 'all INCO-NET projects deliver a set of metrics', while nevertheless acknowledging that 'when it comes to assessing the impact of a policy-oriented project, the assessment is more complex' [Barlas, 2014, p9].

### ***Partner survey feedback on Think Tanks***

Overall, feedback on the think tanks was very positive, with partners suggesting that they were one of the highlights of the project and a very effective mechanism for bringing people together and taking action. Reflecting the preliminary assessment, partners highlighted the value of think tanks as a mechanism to bring together representatives from different sectors, disciplines and regions around areas of mutual interest where partnerships could be formed. Partners saw these events as opportunities to share important findings, to form partnerships, develop directives and priorities for future work and to formulate a roadmap for ST&I strategy. Policy makers were selected to attend based on the area under discussion, so were more engaged with the events:

*This is a natural format for partnerships to evolve - researchers are engaged and bring their particular background, knowledge and interests into the discussion, and new research gaps and questions usually emerge. As a large number of fellow scientists from the two regions are present, these occasions provide a unique opportunity to network with partners they often would not meet otherwise. The policy makers participating in these exercises have been selected, and agreed to attend, based on their interest in the topics discussed. Thus, they usually meet with other policy makers in similar positions or tasked with dealing with similar issues. Furthermore, they meet with experts tasked with working on those issues, or at least with the scientific expertise to tackle them.*

However, while the events were more diverse in nature, partners identified again that the research focus made it difficult to engage non-academics. The cross-cutting nature of the events, as noted in the preliminary assessment, meant that they did not go into great detail, instead focusing on research collaborations between attendees. It was suggested that smaller groups (of around 5-12 participants) made it easier to go into more depth in one area, while larger groups could be incorporated with breakout sessions. Partners also noted that it was important that those attending were aware that the events were participatory and were prepared to get involved in discussions.

Again, selection of participants and ensuring that they were aware of the objectives and format of the event was seen as important in ensuring the most benefit was gained in terms of research outputs and partnerships. As with information sessions, an understanding of the context as well as the research area under discussion would be important for organisers to ensure that the right participants were invited. Moreover, it was proposed that including policy makers on the organising committee could help better target these events for these audiences. The expertise of the participants were seen as important in underpinning the value of the outputs produced, but higher profile participants were also more difficult to include. It was therefore suggested that this should be considered when budgeting for the event. Ensuring good participation from both regions in bi-regional dialogues was also seen as an important factor in selecting participants. Involving policy makers in the events was seen as important where the objective is to produce scientific-policy priorities. While some highlighted the value of high profile participants, it was also noted that for more junior researchers attending, the events offered an opportunity to learn from senior academics in their field.

## **Policy dialogue**

Support for bi-regional ST&I cooperation policy is at the heart of INCO-NET purpose.[INCO-NET Projects; EC; 2008] It is evident however that they work in different ways and have characteristics that vary from region to region, and project to project. It follows that the capacity of policy dialogue platforms to foster bi-regional partnerships is determined by their respective contexts. Neither Warrington et al (2010) nor Barlas (2014) specifically address the strategic role of policy dialogue platforms nor the full range of services offered by INCO-NETs in supporting them. The Capacities Programme Evaluation report, though, does state that ‘many of the INCO-NET projects made a significant contribution to policy dialogue by providing analytical evidence and logistical support to the Joint S&T Cooperation Committee (JSTCC) and meetings of Groups of Senior Officials, and support to the implementation of the decisions taken at such meetings’ [Farrell; 2015. (p22)]

In the Mediterranean region where the bi-regional policy dialogue is well established, the INCO-NET provided the policy platform’s secretariat, while in Africa the INCO-NET provides support through recommendations and advice on aspects of cooperation policy. In both, project partners are not members of the policy platform, although it may be that there are members of the consortia who, in other capacities, act as formal platform members.

One example of the work of PACE-Net Plus was the EU-PAC policy dialogue hosted in New Zealand in 2014; it brought together a range of speakers with a broad interest in the policies and priorities of EU-PAC ST&I cooperation. It was not a formal bi-regional forum between officials from the two regions, but rather a meeting of engaged individuals and organisations, and provided the opportunity to discuss and explore a number of structural issues to consider at more formal meetings in which binding agreements might be made. [PACE-Net Plus; 2014]

What seems important for INCO-NETs to recognise is the distinction between informal discussion meetings and the issuing of recommendations relevant to bi-regional cooperation (including priorities, policies, and programming) on the one hand, and on the other hand formal dialogue between officials with a mandate for national and / or regional policy and decision making. Both of these forums are within the mandates of INCO-NETs to host but intermediate arrangements may fail

to deliver the expected output of either. Barlas (2014, p11-12) for example alluded to a lack of clarity from the EC as to the target audience in bi-regional policy dialogues, and in the case of PACE-Net Plus to a lack of EC engagement (Barlas. 2014 (p12)).

**Recommendation:** PACE-Net Plus should take note of the strengths and weaknesses of bi-regional policy dialogue models used in other regions and learn from the experiences of other INCO-NETs.

No systematic assessment of the bi-regional policy platforms between the EU and third regions and which are supported by INCO-NETs has yet been conducted, but several of the wider studies already quoted indicate their potential role. Despite their different contexts there are some characteristics they have in common. For example it is likely that successful features of formal policy dialogues will include the need for participants to have a national mandate for some aspects of international ST&I cooperation, and for principles of equality in participation to be respected, whether in terms of formal institutions, member states, or individual representatives, of each region.

**Recommendation:** A systematic assessment of the policy dialogues promoted and supported by INCO-NETs could highlight common successes and good practice, allowing subsequent EC initiatives to benefit from such projects.

Any more formalised collaboration between PICTs will not only require the strategic commitment of the governments involved, but also training on how international collaboration works best. This might involve H2020 examples, as well as other intergovernmental collaboration schemes (e.g.- Horizon 2020 Monitoring Report [EC; 2016], Evaluation of the European Union's Cooperation with the Pacific Region 2006-2012 ADE; ITAD; COWI; 2015;)

### ***Partner survey feedback on policy dialogues***

Policy dialogues were identified as a useful mechanism to bring together and create an environment for different stakeholders in society to collaborate on areas such as ST&I policy, developing MOUs etc. The dialogues have helped to build trust and understanding, and to change perceptions.

Reflecting the preliminary assessment and feedback on other mechanisms, it was suggested that the higher the status of participants, the more impact the policy dialogue was likely to have, but that it was difficult to secure participation of high-level stakeholders. Partners noted, as also noted previously, that there may be a trade-off between high-level stakeholders with lower interest in R&I and less influential stakeholders that may be more engaged but have less influence. Some suggested that the platforms were applicable to a broad audience of researchers, academics, policy makers and political leaders, while others proposed that they were best suited to those interested in policy dialogue and strategy, particularly policy makers, and less to those interested in research. Others proposed that the platforms should have the dual objective of contributing to the bigger picture as well as a particular focus.

As for other mechanisms, partners proposed that the selection of participants was important and that events should be designed to meet the needs and interests of those participating. As noted in the preliminary assessments, the objective to explore higher level policy interests as well as research and development more broadly, as well as the applicability for different groups associated with

these objectives, may signal a need for distinct types of events targeting different stakeholders and objectives:

*I feel this mechanism is suited for several (related) objectives - a) presenting results from think tanks, b) discussing these and gauging the opinions of policy makers, c) increasing awareness of the EU in the Pacific and vice versa on a policy maker level, d) sounding opportunities for the development of joint STI initiatives, e.g. by targeted funding calls. The policy dialogues are thus a particularly important tool of PNP.*

Difficulties were also identified in securing participation, dependant on event location, as a result of delays in event planning and due to the influence of cultural priorities in developing regions that were often less focused on research and innovation. For the events to have more impact, partners proposed that more time could be allowed or further events could be used to allow for partnerships to develop. Furthermore, reflecting the preliminary assessment, partners noted that follow up activities were needed to better understand their impact. It was also proposed that they could be combined with think tank meetings given that they were complementary.

*This is still a good tool, in the absence of an institutionalised process of discussion, for making Europe and Pacific meeting, discussing, choosing priorities and ways of action. No doubt that a tighter follow up will be a condition for the success (and practical effects) of such bi-regional platforms*

As noted for other events, the importance of using professional facilitators, using small group sizes and making the events interactive were highlighted.

## **Seed funding for fostering new partnerships**

A common concern raised by participants in PACE-Net Plus events to date has been the limitations to developing new partnerships (via project proposals, etc.) due to a lack of resources for face-to-face meetings. The intrinsic value of physical meetings, particularly for developing trust, is underlined repeatedly in discussions around barriers to new cooperation, while trust itself is often cited as fundamental to effective international research links (e.g. Access to Success: Fostering Trust and Exchange between Europe and Africa Project Compendium [EUA; 2010]; Wanni, N. et al, 2010 - Good Practices in Educational Partnerships: Guide [Africa Unit; BIS; 2010]) PACE-NET Plus's seed funding scheme is intended to address this concern with relatively modest investment.

<p><b>Recommendation:</b> Ensure that the seed funding schemes specifically support activities that address a clear need and facilitate the emergence of new partnerships, and that such schemes are accompanied by tailored M&amp;E processes.</p>
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### ***Partner survey feedback on seed funding***

There was much positive feedback about seed funding and its effectiveness for fostering research partnerships. Partners highlighted how seed funding had been successful in creating networks and research projects, suggesting that when partners meet in person an outcome is higher commitment in the partnership. There is also a suggestion that the small grants offered via the in the PACE-Net Plus seed funding scheme favoured or were more accessible to younger/junior researchers. The



funding had created awareness of the capabilities of PICTs and OCTs, and had been a useful bridging tool for partnerships to form across national and bi-regional lines where other larger funds were harder to access:

*Funding opportunities for research collaborations between the EU and the Pacific are rare, and preliminary work is often required for successful grant proposals. The seed funding thus fills a strategic gap that supports new partnership likely to leading to follow-up collaboration.*

The seed funding was seen as an effective follow on from the earlier think tanks and platforms, so that ideas developed could be put into practice. It was also noted that the seed fund scheme was beneficial for promoting cross-cutting research and that this could be explored further.

*The cross-cutting projects proved very successful, which wasn't expected at the outset. The continuation might see this mechanism to be broadened and widened in terms of participants. It might be developed into something resembling of COST-Actions.*

While the majority of the funding was used for research, the objectives of this research were varied. As well as conducting research, the funding also facilitated partnership building, testing ideas, developing larger research projects and strengthening capacity. While this was not the target of funding calls to date, it was also proposed that this mechanism could be used to support policy dialogues and development-focused research projects. It was, however, noted that if the seed funding scheme was extended to non-academic audiences, care would need to be taken so that it was not used for non-research projects.

While the scale of the funding was accessible to more junior researchers, it was less attractive to more senior academics. The short timeframe and small scale also made it difficult for more in-depth research projects. Partners proposed that fewer, larger grants may be more effective to have a greater impact. The format also made it difficult to gauge whether the fund encouraged new relationships to develop or mostly supported existing networks. There were also difficulties in monitoring and coordinating the funding and assessing its impact. The relevance for policy makers of the research supported was questioned and it was noted that big funds were still inaccessible for South Pacific partners.

On the implementation side, partners proposed that the call for the grants could be better communicated; contracts could be simplified; support could be provided from funding experts; a more rigorous selection process applied; support for better monitoring introduced; and a requirement for publications and presentations from the research:

*The presentation that ... summarized the findings of the seed funding result at the Fiji Platform must be viewed as a positive aspect, which should be continued when/if such seed funding is administered by any other projects in the future.*

It was also proposed that the grants should be organised for the second year of the project or that they should be opened annually, depending on partners' needs.

Partners emphasised the value of this mechanism, but also called for consideration of its longer-term effectiveness.

*To be continued by all means! The best instrument to support the creation of critical mass in areas of particular interest to the region.*

*This was an interesting tool that deserves close scrutiny - it remains to be seen how effective it actually was.*

## **Other ways for promoting EU-PAC partnerships**

In addition to the mechanisms initially implemented by PACE-Net Plus, a number of others were considered in the second half of the project. Based on their experience of existing mechanisms, partners were also asked to give their views on the potential for these mechanisms to facilitate EU-PAC partnerships.

### ***Fostering third country NCPs***

NCPs (National Contact Points) are a key component of the internationalization strategy of the EU's Framework Programme. In advancing international cooperation, INCO-NETs have a legitimate role in encouraging third countries to invest in formally recognized NCPs or NCP-like entities, serving national interests. Taking on the mandated NCP role of promoting awareness of the Framework Programme is arguably a less legitimate activity for INCO-NETs. However, given the limited capacity of most national governments in the Pacific region, it is unrealistic to expect that each nation will be in a position to support new NCPs. The Pacific region, hence, has opportunity to develop a *regional* NCP network, led by a regional organization such as USP ([www.usp.ac.fj](http://www.usp.ac.fj)) or the SPC ([www.spc.int](http://www.spc.int)). Australian and New Zealand NCPs, as in other initiatives, may have a facilitating role to play in developing regional capacity of this nature (Evidence from the PACE-Net Plus 'Directory of Research Capabilities in the Pacific' [ILM; IRD; 2015] may also be useful in this context).

<b>Recommendation.</b> Explore the creation of a regional NCP network for the Pacific
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### **Partner comments:**

There were mixed opinions on how effective this mechanism would be, and some confusion on what it would entail. Some partners thought that it could be useful to have a point of contact in Pacific countries, who could coordinate networking and funding opportunities:

*The network of NCPs is the main structure to provide guidance, practical information and assistance on all aspects of participation in Horizon 2020. Fostering the presence and nomination of NCPs in third countries seems a good mechanism to implement as this will allow first-hand information exchange between researchers who are willing to participate in bi-regional programs or initiatives.*

However, others suggested that there was not the capacity within the Pacific region. There was also some scepticism as to the level of interest from Pacific countries. It was again noted that EU funding was not yet accessible to many in the region and that the NCP would have to be a point of contact for all funding opportunities as there were limited opportunities at present for EU funding.

### **Brokerage events**

Allied to Horizon 2020 information sessions in Europe are brokerage events, bringing together potential partners around a specific call or topic. In the context of R&I partnerships under H2020 such events might be useful, if allied to the use of mobility grants, to bring together non-traditional partners, particularly industry representatives. Project resources, however, should be used impartially for supporting new partnerships, perhaps through competitive schemes.

Anecdotal evidence from the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), based on the experience of conducting many brokerage events, suggests that they might not be cost effective [A J Cherry pers. comm. EEN contact point in Greece (2015)]. At EEN there appears to be a trend towards a more focused approach with brokerage events. Rather than big events (even though in a specific sector) which are basically promotional, the new trend is towards events concentrating on a specific field and with predetermined agendas that include presentations and matchmaking activities involving both researchers and entrepreneurs.

**Recommendation.** The strong connections in PACE-Net Plus to the EU NCP community are an example of sharing lessons learned in regional collaboration.

#### **Partner comments:**

Partner feedback was generally positive for the ability of this mechanism to form partnerships, particularly its potential to bring all interested parties together. However, as already noted, partners highlighted the existing lack of funds that were appropriate for the capacity levels of Pacific partners. Partners proposed that participants would need to be carefully selected and that this may be difficult due to small numbers in the PICTs. There would also need to be a level of trust and if high level participants were desired, they would want to know in advance who would be attending:

*If there is an offer for a brokerage event I would suggest to invite people who know each other or heard of each other. Stakeholders who have got a good network, high impact and are well-known scientists are not going to these events. From my perspective I would contact my colleagues in PAC directly. As long as I don't know who is coming to the brokerage event I would not register.*

In order to encourage greater participation, it was suggested that this kind of event could be linked to a workshop or conference. Consideration would also need to be given to what organisation would be seen as legitimate to organise such event.

### **Attendance of PAC stakeholders in Europeans events**

Perhaps the most important dimension to building partnerships is the opportunity for new partners to meet one another face to face and to raise awareness of mutual interests. As already highlighted partnerships are based on mutual trust. That trust depends on personal relations and that in turn depends on opportunities for physical meetings.

Inviting PAC researchers to present their research interests and capacities to audiences of European researchers helps new partnerships to emerge and existing partnerships to be reinforced.

#### **Partner comments:**

Again, feedback was largely positive for the potential of this mechanism to support partnerships. It was suggested that attendance at events could help PAC stakeholders to better understand EU legislation etc., could boost their visibility in Europe and could lead to joint projects that could later be developed through seed funding:

*Certainly the presence of PAC stakeholders in European events would be beneficial; they would have the chance to have a better understanding of the market and the different legislation among the European countries.*

However, partners suggested that events would need to be selected for their relevance to the Pacific region, and that participants would need to make a case for the benefits of their participation. It was also noted that, while this mechanism may be useful for networking, it may be less beneficial for “stimulating the aggregation process”.

## **Discussion& conclusions**

There are various ways for bi-regional cooperation support projects, such as PACE-Net Plus, to advance bi-regional partnerships in scientific and technological research and innovation in support of EU policy on international cooperation. We are however not aware of rigorous systematic reviews of mechanisms for promoting EU-PAC partnerships. Some of the useful reviews of INCO projects which are available, such as those by Barlas (2014), Warrington *et al* (2010) and Farrell (2015) did not aim to comprehensively assess the approaches used. Much of what is known about their value has come from anecdotal information such as presented here. Continuing research to evaluate what best supports international partnerships would, therefore, be valuable. However, international ST&I cooperation is inherently wide-ranging in its contexts and so which mechanisms work best specifically for INCO projects will, also, vary. Matching types of partnership to their region and context should, itself, be an objective of future such projects.

Diversity of incomes and capacities for research and innovation is a feature of the PAC region and therefore of the EU-PAC ST&I partnership. [ILM; IRD; 2015; EU- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; PIFS; EC; 2015] Irrespective of the mechanisms or approaches used by initiatives such as PACE-Net Plus, achieving successful long term impact from EU-PAC research collaboration is likely to depend on the development of critical mass in the PAC region. Specifically, building regional capacity to help to develop productive partnerships within the Framework Programmes should become a new aspect in future strategies of initiatives such as PACE-Net Plus.

A proven way to establish this critical mass is to network existing or planned groups of researchers around key priorities. Assuming agreement between governments, a networking-tool to support the strategic goal of scientific collaboration between the involved PICTs could be based on the trust and cooperation PACE-Net Plus has established between the partners.

- Such a networking tool could bring together researchers to learn from each other. It would present an economical and highly efficient way to spread awareness and build networks around concrete themes
- It would reflect the human dimension of science, helping researchers to share not only the results of their work but also their aims and methods. It would support governments to

develop evidence-based policies in the best interest of the participating countries/territories.

Working with INCO and thematic projects operating in the same region is beneficial. Indeed INCO reviews have urged links particularly between INCO-NETs and BILATs<sup>1</sup> in a given region. BILATs in principle should involve local partners with strong history of involvement in the FP and with international cooperation. Under such circumstances the exchange of knowledge between BILATs and INCO-Nets is logical. Greater cooperation within a particular region depends not simply on policy but on the circumstances of each project. As examples, FRIENZ and CAESIE, the BILATs for New Zealand and Australia respectively, are or were discrete projects with their own goals and activities. Nevertheless, PACE-Net Plus has maintained contact with FRIENZ and CAESIE through individual partners based in the relevant countries, sharing information in areas of mutual interest, including project funding and events.

At the time of writing (August 2016), the authors are not aware of any Horizon 2020 projects with consortium partners from the South Pacific (excluding Australia and New Zealand). By contrast, in FP7 there were nine projects involving seven Pacific island countries.

Without access to proposal data, it is impossible to attribute this current situation to a specific cause, for example to a lack of project proposals that include Pacific partners, or to the failure of submitted proposals to pass the evaluation process. Nevertheless, our observations of the changes between FP7 and Horizon 2020 that draw on feedback received from international contacts as well as our awareness of some isolated proposals that involved Pacific partners, might offer some insight into the lack of South Pacific participation.

There is a perception that Horizon 2020 call topics have become more inward-focussed relative to FP7, addressing specific European concerns, rather than broader topics that may be more inclusive of external concerns. Indeed, feedback from our various international networks suggests that third country participants have been finding Horizon 2020 less accessible than previous Framework Programmes in terms of topics that are suitable for international participation.

Alongside this purported change, we have also been receiving feedback suggesting that European proposal coordinators (and particularly professional project managers) are increasingly excluding the involvement of third country partners. We believe there are several possible explanations: Firstly, there is a *perception* that proposals with third country participants present a lower chance of success during evaluation for consortia. Statistics from FP7 however refute the perception, showing that proposals with third country partners actually have a higher overall success rate than proposals with purely European consortia.

However, success rates are not the only issue of consideration to proposing consortia. A second explanation relates to negative perceptions about third country partners: Perceived or real capacity and infrastructure issues might be mentioned here (whether this be third countries not eligible to receive funding from the EC, or other third countries with limited structural capacity to undertake projects to H2020 standards).

A third possible explanation relates to the reductions in several EU countries of their domestic research funding systems over the past number of years. We are seeing that a number of researchers in those countries are turning to the Framework Programme funding as an alternative income source. In such cases, the inclusion of third country participants may be perceived as having the effect of diluting the funding available for European partners.

An informal examination of FP7 projects with Pacific partners shows that these projects were largely developed in response to topics that clearly targeted the Pacific (such as PACE-Net and PACE-Net Plus, and ECOPAS) or that were sufficiently narrow as to virtually require Pacific involvement (e.g. certain tropical health or agricultural aspects). To date in Horizon 2020, the range of topics of relevance to Pacific interests and challenges has been far more limited than in FP7, making it more difficult for European partners to justify Pacific involvement.

Our recommendation in this changed landscape is that Pacific actors wishing to participate in H2020 projects should pay particular attention to their value proposition. That is, their unique capabilities and expertise in order to address the specific requirements of given call topics. Only through a clear articulation of the benefit they can bring to Europe will they be competitive in the new Horizon 2020 dynamic. Additionally, we strongly encourage Pacific researchers to continue to build professional relationships with European colleagues, especially through travel to Europe to attend events and meetings, as part of sabbatical programs and fellowships and lab exchanges. And finally, we encourage Pacific researchers to register their interest to be expert evaluators for Horizon 2020 (<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/experts>). If selected, not only will they gain the opportunity to learn more about Horizon 2020 from the inside, they will build new and highly relevant professional connections with other evaluators.

## Abbreviations/Definitions

BILATS – Bilateral Coordination for the Enhancement and Development of S&T Partnerships  
CAAST-Net Plus – Science, Technology and Innovation Co-operation between Sub Saharan Africa and Europe  
CAESIE – Connecting Australian-European Science & Innovation Excellence  
EDF – European Development Fund  
EEN – Enterprise Europe Network  
ERA-NET – European Research Area Network  
ESASTAP - EU-South Africa BILAT (Strengthening Technology, Research, and Innovation Co-operation between Europe and South Africa)  
FEAST – Forum for European-Australian Science and Technology Co-operation  
FP – Framework Programme (of the European Union)  
FRIENZ – Facilitating Research and Innovation Co-operation between Europe and New Zealand  
INCO-NET - International Co-operation Network (bi-regional coordination of science & technology (S&T) cooperation including priority setting and definition of S&T cooperation)  
NCP – National Contact Point  
OCTs – Overseas Countries and Territories  
PICTs - Pacific Islands Countries and Territories  
PIFS – Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat  
SPC – Secretariat of the Pacific Community  
USP – University of the South Pacific

## Glossary

Policy Dialogue - brings together representatives of the European Commission, the EU Member States and the third country, or group of countries in a region, for discussions aimed at promoting cooperation in science and technology, with the objective of formulating action plans and roadmaps for cooperation [Farrell, M.; 2015 (p21)]

Think Tank (TT) – meetings, on an agreed theme, to identify common interests, to suggest joint activities and initiatives for fostering partnerships, and to formulate recommendations for an emerging EU-PAC policy dialogue.

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