

Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States “Charting the Course Toward Resilient Prosperity”

The five interactive dialogues will focus on addressing existing and new and emerging challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development of small island developing States and ways and means to address them, including through the strengthening of collaborative partnerships between small island developing States and the international community, and will identify priorities for the sustainable development of small island developing States.

Interactive dialogue 4: “Leveraging data and digital technologies and building effective institutions for a resilient future in small island developing States” (USP/SPC/SPREP)

1.0 Purpose of the session

This interactive dialogue will explore strategies and actions to bridge data gaps and enhance technological and institutional capacities that empower evidence-based policymaking. The dialogue can also explore tangible steps to implement and utilize the SIDS data hub and leverage recommendations from the Global Digital Compact to advance the adoption of digital technologies and infrastructure, building resilience and sustainable development in SIDS.

2.0 Background

The Pacific SIDS encounters formidable barriers when it comes to embracing digital transformation. From vast geographical spread to small population sizes, limited economic markets, connectivity gaps, and infrastructural constraints, the hurdles are significant.

With 8 of the world's 10 smallest economies within our region, deficiencies in submarine cable connections and affordable mobile broadband access must be addressed to bridge the digital disparities and foster sustainable economic progress.

Digital technologies have the power to boost socio-economic development and resilient development, bridge vast trade distances, integrate urban and rural markets, and open doors to local, regional, and international opportunities for Pacific nations.

3.0 Current Situation and Known Regional and Global Issues

There have been ongoing policy developments in the region. From the 2010 Framework for Action for ICT Development in the Pacific to the Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy which serves as a roadmap for how e-commerce can be used to support regional development goals.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has the potential to accelerate socio-economic development, inclusive governance and sustainable livelihoods. The Pacific region is committed to a unified approach to harmonise policy and regulatory frameworks; address common challenges; find solutions; mobilise resources efficiently to enhance investment; and ensure shared accountability, commitment, and values. At the 2023 Pacific ICT Ministers meeting, 6 priority areas have been identified under the Lagatoi Declaration:

- (i) Digital Transformation

- (ii) Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- (iii) Digital Infrastructure
- (iv) Digital Security and Trust
- (v) Digital Capacity Building and Skills Development
- (vi) Regional Cooperation and Representation

4.0 Regional Progress with Actions and Support Needed

- The Pacific Community, its members and other technical and development partners is leading the way in digital innovation, with groundbreaking programs in fisheries, agriculture, education, disaster management, and climate action.
- The Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme (PEP) developed the Pacific Environment Portal and national portals to address environmental data management, analysis, storage and sharing. SPREP and SPC continues to strengthen partnership in terms of data sharing for informed decision making in the region.
- Initiatives such as Electronic Monitoring and Reporting in the fishing industry have revolutionized data collection processes, enhancing efficiency to support sustainable management of our tuna fisheries and marine resources.
- E-agriculture platforms are boosting knowledge and capacity for the agriculture and forestry sectors through information and learning exchanges to inform actions and policy discussions, between regional experts, national governments, and farming communities. The Pacific Pests and Pathogens app for example is expanding the reach of extension officers, even in locations without internet coverage, highlighting the transformative potential of ICT in the agriculture sector.
- Education technological innovations in the region encompass a comprehensive suite of applications facilitating the development, administration, and reporting of Large-Scale Assessment results such as the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) and the Pacific Assessment of Lower Secondary (PALS). These technologies streamline student, school, and teacher registration, offer multilingual item translation support, utilize mobile apps for data capture, and provide data exploration tools, displaying the potential to advance inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities.
- Connectivity is disparate in the region. The Pacific SIDS mobile network coverage is lower than in LDCs (Least Developed Countries), impacting the ability of Pacific people to meaningfully engage in the digital economy. However, we have witnessed the rise of social media platforms as vibrant marketplaces and emerging e-commerce platforms such as the Emstret Space Limited in Papua New Guinea an online platform designed to provide solutions to young entrepreneurs, start-ups assisting with resourcing and connecting freelancers, mentors, investors and SMEs; and, Fiji's Sole Fintech app, a social financial e-platform designed to empower local communities financial literacy and develop sustainable capital generation (essentially a mobile phone app that allows users to send, receive, spend and save for specific projects). Tonga's Mobile Applications Community MHEW and Response System (MACRES) is an information system designed to improve early warning and early response to hazards and disaster events.
- In response to the accelerating adoption of e-commerce in the Pacific, Samoa has launched its 5-year e-commerce strategy and roadmap which aims to facilitate the promotion of goods and

services across digital platforms. These examples highlight the growing ambitious spirit in our region and the multitude of opportunities that can be leveraged through innovative partnerships.

- The Digital Earth Pacific initiative utilizes satellite data for earth and ocean observations to track ecosystem changes, coastline alterations, and infrastructure developments to inform and accelerate climate, disaster, oceans, food systems, and natural resource management policy actions.
- In response to the Pacific regional needs assessments, SPC through its members and partners is focusing on key priorities such as land cover detection, agricultural censuses, geo-resources, adaption, mitigation, and hazard impact mapping. Decision-ready products like Pacific Coastlines, Water Observations from Space, and Pacific Mangroves are demonstrating the tangible impact of digital solutions on sustainable development policy decisions and investments.
- The Pacific Data Hub initiative serves as a centralized repository for vast datasets, supporting data-driven decision-making and collaboration. This regional platform enhances data management and regional data governance, driving digital transformation and innovation across various thematic areas such as economic development, marine spatial planning, and climate change adaptation efforts.
- Tuvalu's ambitious Future Now presents an opportunity for partners and members to explore technological and scientific advances that establishes a digital state in the metaverse with a member's sovereignty, culture, history and community maintained.
- To fully leverage these opportunities, concerted efforts are essential. Prioritizing digital literacy, ensuring affordable broadband access, and cultivating a supportive environment for digital entrepreneurship are vital steps. The interdependencies between communication and energy systems needs to be recognised as it requires equitable investments. Collaboration among governments, private sector stakeholders, and international organizations is crucial to propel and scale up these initiatives.