



Pacific Islands Universities Research Network (PIURN)

SAMOA Pathway priority areas	Climate Change, Food Security & Nutrition, Water & Sanitation, Biodiversity, Means of Implementation, including Partnerships, Health and NCDs, Sustained and Sustainable, Inclusive and Equitable Economic Growth with Decent Work for All, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, Social Development
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Geography	Pacific region (excluding New Zealand, Australia and US territories)
Partners	<p>Members of PIURN: Divine Word University (PNG); Fiji National University; National University of Samoa; Pacific Adventist University (PNG); PNG University of Natural Resources and Environment; PNG University of Technology; Solomon Islands National University; The University of Goroka (PNG); The University of the South Pacific; University of Fiji; University of French Polynesia; University of New Caledonia; and the University of Papua New Guinea</p> <p>Partners of PIURN: Pacific Island Development Forum, UNESCO (informal)</p> <p>External collaborators: Each member university has their own projects with their own project partners/collaborators</p>
Timeframe	<p>PIURN: 2012 – open ended</p> <p>Sub-projects: 2-3 years</p>
Beneficiaries	The direct beneficiaries are Pacific countries that own the national universities that are members in the partnership. The overall research themes further address knowledge and capacity needs of the region, which is beneficial for all Pacific people and communities.

SIDS-Specific

The Pacific Islands Universities Research Network (PIURN) is a partnership consortium of thirteen universities in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). The partnership was established in 2012 to enable closer and meaningful collaboration among researchers to identify and address, by means of research, development & innovation, the social, economic and environmental development challenges for the region. In addressing such challenges through research, PIURN works towards the achievement of the SAMOA Pathway priority areas and the SDGs in the region.

PIURN’s vision is to ensure “a prosperous Pacific Region, where science, technology and innovation research collaborations address in particular the needs of the people in identified priority areas”. PIURN addresses priority areas through the establishment of research collaborations on diverse topics, such as monitoring air pollution, evaluating effectiveness of climate change adaptation programmes, developing drinking water standards, modelling water services for informal settlements, addressing threats to traditional food security, fostering understanding of linkages between family agriculture and health, measuring contaminants in coral reefs, and establishing an academic network on migrations and climate change.



Measurable and Monitorable

PIURN facilitates the opportunity for member universities to propose and undertake specific projects in response to an annual call for proposals. The projects are implemented by a lead university in collaboration with supporting universities and external partners. Each project must meet a set of specific criteria that are agreed upon by the partnership, which includes the project's alignment with strategic research themes; its contribution to capacity building; its multidisciplinary nature; participation of partner universities in leading and supporting roles; participation of external collaborators; and a plan for the dissemination of research outcomes.

PIURN has *four broad research areas* that align to the priority areas of the SAMOA Pathway, namely (1) Food Security & Nutrition, and Health & Non-Communicable Diseases; (2) Climate Change & Biodiversity, including Land Degradation; (3) Capacity Building, and Data & Statistics; and (4) Social Development, Gender Equality & Education.

PIURN also works around *four strategic research themes*, which are derived from Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and underpinned by innovation, empowerment & sustainability.

The research areas and strategic research themes collectively provide for four research frameworks:

- *Theme 1 - Economic Growth, and Public & Private Sector Development* (Goals 1, 8, 9, 11);
- *Theme 2 - Oceans, Land & Climate* (Goals 6, 13, 14, 15);
- *Theme 3 - Education, Culture & Health* (Goals 2, 3, 4), and;
- *Theme 4 - Governance, Justice and Equality* (Goals 5, 10, 16, 17).

PIURN uses a distributed model of Monitoring and Evaluation, which means that each partner university evaluates its own progress on the projects that it leads using existing methodologies.

The partnership collectively reviews data from projects that are carried out by member universities to avoid overlap and for enhancing collaboration between project researchers and thematic areas.

Achievements of the partnership as a whole are measured through indicators relating to implementing projects, their compliance to PIURN criteria, and the connections created between partner universities and experts.

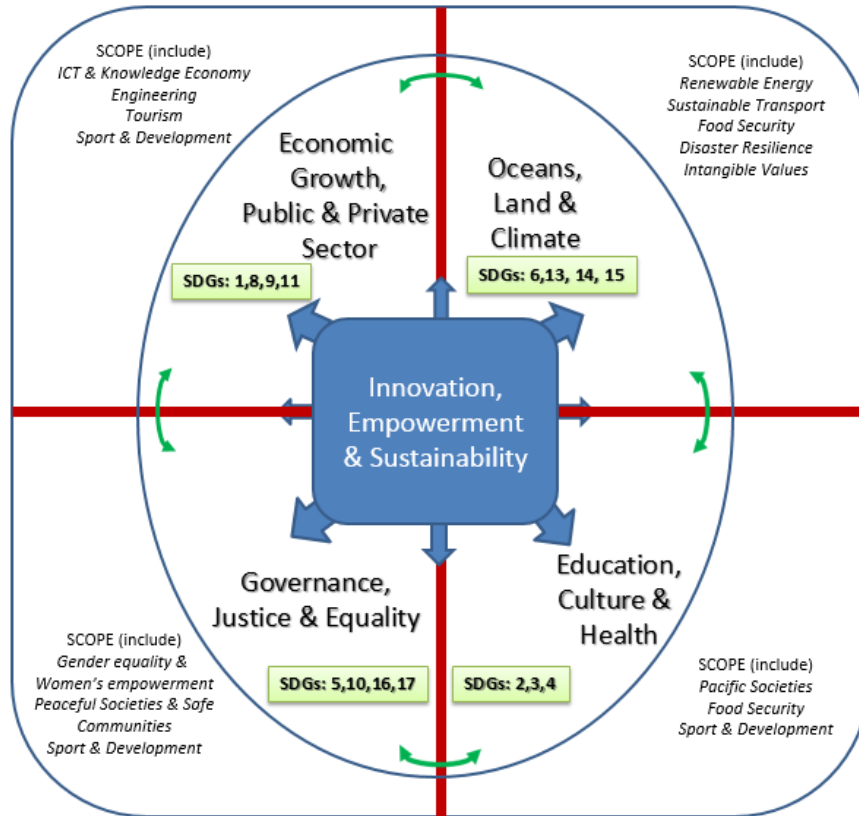


FIGURE 1: THE FOUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH THEMES APPLIED BY PIURN.

Achievable & Accountable

The objectives of the PIURN were designed by the Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of member universities in the lead up to the 2014 Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in recognition of the crucial role science and technology has in advancing sustainable development in the region.

The partnership's governance system is framed around its board, its lead coordinators (currently University of the South Pacific and University of New Caledonia), and a dedicated Secretariat. PIURN board members are Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of member universities or their nominees.

The Secretariat, based at the University of South Pacific, takes on a coordinating role in organizing research conferences and sharing of knowledge and results from research projects. It is also responsible for maintaining communications between the board, member universities, and other stakeholders.

Each university leading a project informs the board about the implementation status of their project, including achievements and possible challenges. The results of projects are also communicated broadly at bi-annual conferences, which are organized to strengthen cooperation between PIURN partners and external collaborators, and for designing new collaborative projects.

The Secretariat ensures that all partner universities have an equal opportunity to participate in calls for proposals.



Resource-based & results focused

Member universities fund their own participation, as the partnership has no sources of external funding.

PIURN has one permanent staff and leverages its regional network to draw on the expertise of each member university.

PIURN enables all universities, large or small, to be equal partners in the network - thus instilling a sense of ownership and broad participation. Two larger universities (University of South Pacific and University of New Caledonia) pool their financial resources in order to fund some of the more long-term research projects. Smaller member universities contribute to the partnership through in-kind resources and by funding their participation in the biannual conferences. This mixed funding approach has allowed the partnership to overcome some of the challenge of limited availability of research funds.

In addition, PIURN targets international funding opportunities. PIURN has expertise in developing research proposals, and in seeking funding for the proposed projects from international funding organizations such as the European Commission's Horizon 2020 and carrying out research and development for already funded projects.

PIURN makes funds available for its beneficiaries to undertake research through calls for proposals, and by building the capacity of young, early-career researchers. There is a great degree of sustainability in this approach as it addresses the issue of 'brain drain' that is prevalent in the region.

Timeline for implementation & transparency by all parties

While PIURN is an open-ended partnership, the timeframe for each project is determined by the universities and depends on the nature of the research. Usually, projects run for two to three years.

To ensure no one is left behind, stakeholder engagement is achieved through the biannual conferences where Pacific researchers and PIURN members share their knowledge and forge new collaborations. Communication is also undertaken through emails and webpages.

Partnership development

The core driving force behind the establishment of the partnership was the belief that a collaborative research network could positively assist the region in advancement of policy and sustainable development.

The opportunity presented itself in 2012, when several universities from the region were invited to participate in the Europe-Pacific Network for Science and Technology (PACE-Net) project. With the support of PACE-NET and other international organizations, PIURN was established.

A partnership approach has allowed for sharing of human and technical resources and expertise and ensured alignment of activities with regional interests and the priority areas of the SAMOA Pathway.

The partnership reinforces Pacific regionalism by building and demonstrating the strength in collaborative and regional research. The immediate benefits of providing funding to a regionally-established partnership have become increasingly visible, as a partnership can leverage the strengths of its membership and take advantages of opportunities as a collective.



Overall Learning

Communication challenges, which might be caused by unreliable internet connections, expensive airfares, or political instabilities, may result in lack of engagement by members.

However, there are many bright spots. By setting high-level objectives, with modest requiring actions, the partnership has ensured broad engagement and high success rate of its activities. By moving slowly - but steadily - the partnership has been able to establish a robust network with a solid foundation.

Through the forging of new collaborations between universities in the region, several tangible impacts and “spill-over effects” have emerged. Previously, collaborations between universities were mainly undertaken through bilateral agreements, but since the establishment of PIURN, several cross-regional collaborations are taking place, including between French territories and other Pacific countries. The partnership has also encouraged some PICTS to establish new national universities in order to join PIURN and to participate in its research collaborations.

Future plans and sustainability

PIURN is set to become a key think tank to support governments of PICTs in shaping policy based on relevant scientific and socioeconomic data.

PIURN also aspires to become a main funding body for research in PICTs by the establishment of a Regional Research Council. The Council will also assist in monitoring the quantity and quality of research conducted in PICTs.

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More information

<https://piurn.org/>

<https://sidspartnerships.un.org/partnerships/?p=7753>