

ESSAY

# THE SECOND TRACK AND *TALANOA*: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *PACIFIC CONNECT* PROGRAMME IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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**The Second Track and *talanoa* – a Pacific term for conversation – share many common traits. Both are based on a foundation of mutual trust and offer a comfortable forum to share ideas. Both appreciate the importance of listening as well as talking and value other people’s experience and insights. ICDP’s communications coordinator Benjamin Blackshaw explains how Second Track methodology has been applied to pursue idealistic goals through realistic steps as part of the *Pacific Connect* programme.**

## INTRODUCTION

Modern technology is empowering seamless communication, limitless commercial opportunities and positive social change across the world. However, some developing countries still fail to reap these ‘digital dividends’ and the broader socio-economic benefits generated by digital technologies.<sup>1</sup> In the Pacific Islands, where digital transformation remains one of the vital developmental priorities, the improvement of social and economic standards through technology will require stronger cross-regional cooperation and multinational collaboration.<sup>2</sup> Policymakers in Australia and the region itself are still grappling to find the best ways to help Island nations overcome a raft of challenges they face and empower local communities to make the most of emerging technologies.

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1. The World Bank, 2016

2. Digital adaptation a priority for the Pacific, ICDP blog featuring C. Sampson’s submission to the Pacific Islands Forum, 29 Nov 2018

Increasing geopolitical competition is shrouding genuine gestures in the Pacific Islands, while traditional methods of engagement, such as the Track One mechanisms of representational diplomacy, can create additional barriers. Second Track processes, which bring together diverse participants in informal discussions to solve common problems, could be another way to tackle complex issues facing the region.

While they are diverse in their cultures, histories and circumstances, many Pacific Islands share common issues including their geographic remoteness, lack of economies of scale, limited skilled human resources, and a social hesitance to embrace ICT<sup>3</sup>-enabled education and health care.<sup>4</sup> The problems caused by these long-standing developmental challenges are compounded by the rapidly increasing threat of climate change. The accelerated and agile nature of Second Track processes may offer a more rapid, as well as more effective, collective response.

The following article explores the potential of Second Track approaches in the Pacific by examining the work of the International Centre for Democratic Partnership (ICDP) and the unique combination of Second Track methods and Pacific *talanoa* in its implementation of the Australian Government's *Pacific Connect* programme.

## TRACK TWO DIPLOMACY AND GAP'S SECOND TRACK PROCESS

Traditional diplomacy may be defined as the 'primary peacekeeping tool of a state's foreign policy'.<sup>5</sup> Track One engagement aims to manage conflicts between nation-states. Still, the defence of entrenched public positions can turn it into a

stumbling block rather than a pathway to conflict resolution. Furthermore, ideological disparities, power imbalances and competing self-interest can hamper its effectiveness in producing mutually agreeable outcomes to common problems.<sup>6</sup> Over time, informal avenues between public officials or private citizens of the countries involved have proved more valuable in building trust and have often led to startling success stories of engagement.

The practice of private, unofficial mediation between citizens and groups was conducted for centuries before the concept of Second Track diplomacy was coined by Joseph Montville, an American diplomat, in 1981. He defined Track Two diplomacy as 'unofficial, non-structured interaction' which is 'always open-minded, often altruistic and... strategically optimistic. Its underlying assumption is that actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to goodwill and reasonableness'.<sup>7</sup>

Track Two discussions have fostered many successful outcomes in seemingly intractable conflict situations, including mediation between FARC<sup>8</sup> rebels and the Colombian Government, and back-channel dealings in South Africa during negotiations to dismantle apartheid.<sup>9</sup> The approach also extended beyond international peacekeeping to encompass a wide range cultural, technical, and structural contexts, including the Dartmouth and Pugwash Conferences which improved cultural and scientific links between the East and West at the height of the Cold War.<sup>10</sup>

Global Access Partners (GAP), an independent Australian policy institute, has been applying and developing this approach since its creation in 1997, to allow stakeholders in domestic social, economic

3. Information and communications technologies.

4. B. Hogeveen, The changing dynamics of internet governance in the South Pacific, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 12 Sep 2018

5. J. Mapendere, Track one and a half diplomacy and the complementarity of tracks, *Culture of Peace Online Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2006, p. 67

6. T. Bohmelt, The effectiveness of tracks of diplomacy strategies in third-party interventions, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2010, pp. 167–17

7. W.D. Davidson and J.V. Montville, Foreign Policy According to Freud, *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 45, Winter 1981-1982, p. 155

8. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, after the initials in Spanish)

9. Conflict resolution relies increasingly on diplomatic back channels, *The Economist*, 21 Jan 2020

10. Ibid.

and structural issues cooperate across traditional boundaries in the search for common solutions.<sup>11</sup>

Promoted as 'the Second Track process', GAP's method assembles multidisciplinary groups of individuals from public sector, commercial and academic backgrounds to hold non-attributable discussions on specific challenges. The Second Track is a two-step process, with the frank discussions between individuals from stakeholder groups being followed by the group itself implementing its recommendations, launching commercial offerings or creating permanent bodies to cement long-term relationships between members.<sup>12</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF ICDP AND PACIFIC CONNECT

To complement Track One engagements undertaken by Australia in the Pacific Islands, GAP established the International Centre for Democratic Partnerships (ICDP) in 2017. ICDP is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation that builds on GAP's 20 years plus experience in operating successful Second Track taskforces and projects and applies it in the Pacific developmental context.

As part of the 'people-to-people' pillar outlined in Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper,<sup>13</sup> the Australian Government launched the *Pacific Connect* programme to forge stronger relationships between Pacific and Australian leaders across the public, private, academic and community sectors. *Pacific Connect* aimed to complement the Government's numerous other digital innovation, cyber engagement, female leadership and research programmes in the region. The distinctive Second Track approach championed by GAP and ICDP saw the team win a two-year pilot contract in 2017 to run *Pacific Connect*.

ICDP is currently implementing *Pacific Connect* on a three-year extension. It supports joint projects run by Pacific Islanders and Australians, offers networking and educational opportunities for entrepreneurs, and emphasises female leadership roles under a theme of *Australia-Pacific Connections for a Digital Future*.

The ICDP team develops cross-cultural relationships by encouraging local generation, support and ownership of ideas and projects emerged from *Pacific Connect* Dialogues on particular topics, using the Second Track process. The relationships, begun and strengthened by these events, are then nurtured to become self-sustaining networks. ICDP, through its partners in GAP and the Strategic Development Group, has access to a network of more than 4,500 experienced individuals in Australia and can use their expertise to develop relationships, offer mentorship and cooperate on practical projects.

## ICDP'S SECOND TRACK METHODOLOGY

To stand out in a crowded field of conferences and regional events, *Pacific Connect* workshops and Dialogues emphasise their provision of focused and nurturing meeting spaces for current and emerging leaders. The Dialogues embrace open discourse, with participants shedding their official titles to overcome official and unofficial barriers. In the words of *The Economist*, the Second Track 'creates a safe space where ideas can be aired and proposals tested, without official fingerprints'.<sup>14</sup>

These elements of Second Track engagement mesh well with the traditional Pacific culture of face-to-face interaction, storytelling, and mutual respect and support, known as *talanoa*.

11. C. Fritz-Kalish, Twenty Years on the Second Track, *Journal of Behavioural Economics and Social Systems*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 45

12. *Ibid.*, p. 46

13. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper

14. Conflict resolution relies increasingly on diplomatic back channels, *The Economist*, 21 Jan 2020

*Talanoa* is a traditional Fijian term for inclusive, participatory, and honest discussions which differ from Track One approaches in their informal and individual nature. Rather than encourage critical observations and an adversarial approach, *talanoa* engagements create space for empathy for different contexts. The approach is used throughout the Pacific, from community meetings to regional gatherings, and was adopted for the COP23 meeting in Germany and COP24 in Poland.<sup>15</sup>

These *talanoa* climate discussions looked to break the impasse of the concurrent Track One negotiations on the issue. They saw government officials, business and NGO<sup>16</sup> leaders, and city and town representatives share their personal experiences of climate change, foster empathy for each other's experiences and inform the official, Track One talks. Rather than haggle over technical terms, its roundtable discussions explored 'Where are we?', 'Where do we want to go?' and 'How do we get there?'<sup>17</sup> The COP23 *talanoa* generated over 200 discussion points and proposals<sup>18</sup> and COP24 then doubled that total.<sup>19</sup> Many of these points highlighted the need for climate security and the links between poverty and developmental challenges, human rights and economic opportunities. Organisers hoped *talanoa* process would produce a moral appeal for action, and shape the official COP24 outcomes to promote regional climate sustainability ambitions and actions.<sup>20</sup> The Fiji Prime Minister and COP23 President, Frank Bainimarama, urged delegates to understand that 'we all have legitimate points of view, but that we are all essentially in the same canoe'.<sup>21</sup>

ICDP's interweaving of *talanoa* strengthens the Pacific Connect programme and its Second Track

proceedings. The sharing of compelling personal experiences and an emphasis on empathy boost participants' mutual understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face. One participant in a recent Brisbane *Pacific Connect* Dialogue on social impact noted that 'As a group of women, each of us attended the Brisbane *talanoa* with our own dreams and hopes for our lives and for our families. Our crossing paths at the Brisbane *talanoa* was refreshing, and, as women of the Pacific, a reminder that we all shared the common goal; to create a better, more sustainable future for our Pacific region and the wellbeing of its people'.<sup>22</sup>

The Second Track process has been adapted by ICDP in this way to accommodate Pacific culture and improve outcomes for both Pacific and Australian participants. Ample time is allocated in each regional event for individuals to build rapport through one-on-one and small group discussions. Informal practice pitches are also a feature of *Pacific Connect* Dialogues, allowing Pacific participants to draw inspiration and receive feedback from their peers as well as event facilitators. Extra-curricular visits and activities are also arranged to build cultural awareness and understanding and deepen enduring cross-cultural relationships.

ICDP currently brings together emerging leaders from six countries – Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu – from diverse public and private sector disciplines. ICDP's Second Track welcomes involvement from current public sector staff; however, all participants attend in a personal, rather than professional, capacity. This approach allows a more personal appraisal of current circumstances and creates more freedom for innovative solutions.

15. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Talanoa* Dialogue Platform, 2018

16. Non-government organisation

17. R. Toito'ona, How successful was the *Talanoa* Dialogue in COP24? *Solomon Star Newspaper*, 22 Dec 2019

18. Foresight, *Talanoa* dialogue: climate change negotiations are not a diplomat-only affair anymore, 08 May 2020

19. V. Rattani, COP24: *Talanoa* Dialogue ends with a weak declaration, *Down To Earth*, 13 Dec 2018

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, no 11

22. D. Lewis Boucher, *Our Oceania: Forging a path in uncertain times*, 19 Mar 2020

ICDP's Second Track approach aims to foster long-term relationships between Australians and their Pacific Islander counterparts, rather than limit interaction to the events themselves. Economic outcomes and leadership development is a *result* of these relationships, rather than the relationships stemming from business or political ties.

While participants from a range of backgrounds are invited, all share common attributes and goals to ensure positive interactions and productive outcomes. Although an ambitious personal attitude is important, so is a genuine commitment to local and regional development, a sense of humility and the ability to embrace and engage others as well as implement change. Participants are selected based on a proven record of trust and respect in the community, and an extensive network with which they are willing to share.

Participants initially spend time together in an informal networking session, 'breaking the ice' and forming new relationships which will encourage them to share ideas and policy approaches later in the Dialogue. This stands in contrast to typical Track One engagements, which are often of much longer duration but, given their formal, rigid nature, provide less scope for relationship building.<sup>23</sup>

ICDP Dialogues have the practical aim of developing solutions to local manifestations of 'wicked' problems through digital technology. Over the last three years, *Pacific Connect* Dialogues have considered digital marketplaces,<sup>24</sup> assistive technology,<sup>25</sup> freight and logistics,<sup>26</sup> creative industries,<sup>27</sup> and female entrepreneurship and leadership development.<sup>28</sup> The extensive application process enables Dialogue facilitators group like-minded entrepreneurs to enhance the

prospect of long-term relationships persisting, as well as generating project ideas participants could collaborate on overtime.

At least one Pasifika facilitator is present at each Dialogue, having worked in-country to plan the event, define the topic, design the agenda, identify keynote speakers and select participants. Their subject-matter expertise, local knowledge and personal networks also help them work with participants to develop projects after the Dialogue.

After introductions have been made and commonalities established, co-facilitators guide the assembled delegates through an overview of the problem at hand. This might be underdeveloped water hygiene and sanitation measures in Solomon Islands, for example. Each participant is then encouraged to share their experience of this issue and outline their thoughts on a solution in a respectful application of *talanoa*.

Three to five project ideas tend to emerge from each Dialogue, with participants self-organising in groups to brainstorm business plans or a pitch to present to the group as a whole. Presenting project ideas to the collective generates immediate feedback, which can be used to hone the proposal. Participants may join several projects, depending on their interest and experience and skills.

A communiqué is published after each Dialogue to sum up proceedings for participants and keep key stakeholders informed. Groups maintain contact through Slack channels provided by ICDP to develop the project, deepen their interaction and extend the network involved. Additional investors, suppliers and stakeholders from government, commercial, academic or community sectors can also collaborate on the platform as required.

23. G. Mungkaje, Building Australia – Pacific partnerships through entrepreneurship, 22 Jan 2020

24. ICDP, Digital Marketplace & Online Services *Pacific Connect* Dialogue Report, Dec 2019

25. ICDP, Technology Enabling Inclusiveness Dialogue Communiqué, 20 Aug 2019

26. ICDP, *Pacific Connect* Dialogue Freight and Logistics Report, Aug 2019

27. ICDP, Samoa Creative Industries Dialogue Communiqué, 04 Jul 2019

28. ICDP, Brisbane Social Entrepreneurship Dialogue Communiqué, 09 Mar 2020

## POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF IMPLEMENTING ICDP SECOND TRACK METHODS IN THE PACIFIC

Although ICDP is less than three years old, it has already enabled *Pacific Connect* as a broadly respected and fast-growing Second Track platform in the region. It has organised 29 Dialogues and workshops so far, creating 92 collaborative ideas to take forward. Several projects are proceeding to implementation, and five have received funding or awards from international stakeholders, governments or development agencies. There are over 500 members of the *Pacific Connect* community, including over 280 emerging leaders. Two-thirds of this network are female, and 70% are Pacific Islanders. Seventy-three members are Australian, with the next largest in-country networks being Fiji (47) and Papua New Guinea (42). Over 3,800 messages have been exchanged on ICDP's *Slack* forums, and over 50 community members use it every week.

Participant testimonials can speak for the success of ICDP's Second Track approach to problem-solving, relationship building and project development:

**'I believe *Pacific Connect* allows us to collaborate with like-minded emerging leaders. This is the answer to many challenges encountered by Pacific Island countries over time, especially in terms of strengthening "Australia-Pacific Connections for a digital future" through collaboration on projects and ongoing network activities.'**

– a Solomon Islands Dialogue participant<sup>29</sup>

**'I met many fascinating people through the Dialogue whom I am now working with or plan to work with in the future. The Dialogue gave me a platform to challenge myself, extend my own skills, knowledge and experience, and make connections that I would not have access to otherwise. The Pacific is vast, and the chance to reach out and connect with one another and converse differently on how we can address shared challenges is to be valued beyond measure.'** – a Solomon Islands (freight and logistics) Dialogue participant<sup>30</sup>

**'It has truly been a wonderful experience for me to be invited to participate in this Dialogue. The time spent together was invigorating, meeting like-minded and impactful women across the Pacific sharing experiences, insights, exchanging contacts and making connections. I just loved the energy in the Dialogue room.'** – a PNG-based Pacific Connect Community member

**'Through ICDP I have been able to connect with other Australian entrepreneurs as well, who have been very helpful in providing advice and assistance in connecting me to other entrepreneurs who are doing similar work in the Pacific. As part of the ICDP alumni, you have access to amazing entrepreneurs in the South Pacific and Australia. What I've found is that I can approach them for any advice and any assistance and they're always willing to help, which has been useful especially being based in Fiji, and sometimes needing help from Australia.'**<sup>32</sup>

29. ICDP, Testimonials

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. P. Benson, Pauline Benson's inspiring entrepreneurial story, 16 Jan 2020

Examples of projects emanating from or linked to ICDP's Second Track initiatives include:

- The establishment of the first Pacific World Economic Forum **Global Shapers hub in Samoa**.<sup>33</sup>
  - **Tugeda**, a digital map of education infrastructure which turns every building in the Solomon Islands into a potential classroom.<sup>34</sup>
  - The installation of **outdoor touchscreens and WiFi hotspots for young Solomon Islanders in rural and remote Solomon Islanders**<sup>35</sup> to deliver educational material.
  - The **'Shifting Homes' Virtual Reality** project in Samoa which was chosen as an exhibitor at The Australian Pavilion at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale Di Venezia.
  - The online **Less than Container Load** platform that will help small-scale aggregators and exporters share information with farmers about export markets, pricing and logistics.
  - The **MobileMe app** in Fiji which maps access for people with disability to buildings in Suva. On 3 December 2019 – the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities – local supporters and volunteers captured data of existing infrastructure, and work is now underway to improve access around the town and share this information with the public.<sup>36</sup>
  - The creation of the **Yumi Wan project** which provides online mentoring, advice and support to businesswomen from regional Australia and Vanuatu.
- The establishment of the **Pacific Finds** eCommerce platform for micro, small and medium enterprises owned by female entrepreneurs to help them market and sell their products online.

An independent review of the *Pacific Connect* programme substantiated the success of the Second Track process in fostering relationships. Ninety-five per cent of Dialogue participants said they would stay in contact with each other, while 90% agreed that '*Pacific Connect* is a programme that expands and strengthens Australian-Pacific connections by developing new networks'.<sup>37</sup> Eighty-nine per cent of surveyed participants agreed that the programme 'cultivates meaningful enduring relationships between Australian and Pacific individuals and organisations', and over four-fifths believed it would contribute to regional economic development.<sup>38</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE OF MEASURING SECOND TRACK OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Despite the ever-increasing number of Track Two channels,<sup>39</sup> and the early successes of *Pacific Connect* programme, objective assessment for measuring the wider success of these frameworks is still in their infancy. The difficulty of the problems to be faced, the diverse actors involved, and their varying ability to leverage power, finance and networks can mean that dialogues may take time to deliver concrete results.<sup>40</sup> While the dialogues can generate ideas and build partnerships, additional funding is often

33. Global Shapers Community, Apia Hub

34. Common Code, Every building is a classroom with Tugeda, 18 Mar 2020

35. Hitnet, Our work reaches communities in the most remote corners of the world

36. B. Blackshaw, ICDP joins forces for MobileMe Mapathon, 19 Nov 2019

37. P. Simoes dos Santos, Evaluation of *Pacific Connect* Year Two, University of Technology Sydney Institute for Public Policy and Governance, 2019, pp. 9–19

38. Ibid.

39. Conflict resolution relies increasingly on diplomatic back channels', *The Economist*, 21 Jan 2020

40. Ibid.

required to turn these ideas into reality, discussions may circle around particular sticking points, or projects may evolve beyond their initial intentions.<sup>41</sup> The engagement fostered by a Second Track dialogue is never 'linear',<sup>42</sup> and its facilitators must be agile in their efforts to retain focus on desired outcomes, as noted by the facilitator of the inaugural *Pacific Connect* Dialogue in Nuku'alofa, Tonga.<sup>43</sup>

## IN CONCLUSION

ICDP's application of the Second Track approach in the Pacific demonstrates how new types of engagements by non-traditional actors can bring people together for positive ends. By melding the Second Track format with traditional *talanoa*, ICDP has established active networks and innovative projects at a fraction of the cost of other schemes.

Despite the structural problems of distance, funding and the current COVID-19 crisis, the Second Track-powered *Pacific Connect* programme has proved its worth by empowering individuals, businesses and local communities to complement traditional aid and Track One diplomatic engagements.

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41. T. Bohmelt, The effectiveness of tracks of diplomacy strategies in third-party interventions, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2010, pp. 167–178

42. Above, no.3

43. A. Carriline, Reflections from a facilitator on a Tonga Dialogue, 09 Dec 2019



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