

Council of the Pacific Islands Background Guide

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Letter From Chair.....	2
Council Background and Mission.....	3
Topic A: Preservation of Native Practices, Languages, and Cultural Heritage Sites.....	3
Introduction.....	3
History of Colonialism.....	4
Modern Day Colonialism & the Importance of Land.....	6
Current Efforts of Preservation.....	8
Conclusion.....	10
Guiding Questions.....	11
Topic B: Impacts of Modernization in the Pacific.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Economic and Environmental Challenges.....	13
Pressure from the International Community.....	15
Cultural Erosion & Urbanization.....	16
Overcoming Challenges and Current Policies.....	18
Conclusion.....	20
Guiding Questions.....	21
Bibliography.....	22

Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

My name is Mia Sorgie and I'm so excited to be your Chair for this committee! A little background on me, I live in southern North Carolina, I'm a sophomore here at GW majoring in Political Science and International Affairs, and I'm also on the GW MUN travel team! Outside of classes and MUN I enjoy art history, Formula 1, and live music. I helped out at WAMUNC last year as a staffer and am looking forward to the experience of being a Chair this year! While I encourage you all to be creative and come up with unique solutions, remember that the core of this council is focused on indigenous groups throughout the Pacific. These are real groups that have historically suffered, so please acknowledge and respect that when discussing and providing possible solutions. I can't wait to hear your ideas and see what you all come up with. Let's have a great WAMUNC 2025!

Best of luck,

Mia Sorgie

Council Background and Mission

The Council of the Pacific Islands was founded to promote regional cooperation and address the unique challenges faced by Pacific Island nations. These challenges include economic development, climate change, security, and the preservation of cultural identities. The council was also created to provide a platform for Pacific island leaders to collaborate on common issues, advocate for the region's interests on the global stage, and strengthen diplomatic and economic ties. Its mission is to foster sustainable development, enhance regional security, and support the resilience of Pacific Island countries in the face of environmental and geopolitical challenges. By working together, the member states aim to improve the well-being of their citizens and ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of the Pacific region.

Topic A: Preservation of Native Practices, Languages, and Cultural Heritage Sites

Introduction

The Pacific Islands, a vast and diverse region stretching across the world's largest ocean, has been home to diverse Indigenous cultures for thousands of years. These cultures developed distinct societies, each with its own traditions, governance systems, ways of life, languages, and histories.¹ Yet the challenge of protecting these traditions and sites has been on the forefront of local's minds as indigenous rights and protections become globally recognized. Despite centuries of colonialism, the enduring strength of these communities and their cultural practices remains central to the identity of the Pacific Islands today. As the region faces modern challenges, such as ethnic exclusion and political pressures, the resilience of native Pacific Islanders continues to be a source of cultural pride and a vital force in the ongoing preservation of their heritage.

¹ "OIA Blogs: Who Are Pacific Islanders? | U.S. Department of the Interior," U.S. Department of The Interior, n.d., <https://www.doi.gov/oia/Who-are-Pacific-Islanders>.

History of Colonialism

The first encounters between Pacific Islanders and Europeans occurred during the Age of Exploration. Portuguese and Spanish explorers, such as Ferdinand Magellan, were among the first to chart parts of the Pacific Ocean in the 16th century, but it was the British, French, and Dutch who established the most lasting colonial presences.² In the late 18th century, British explorer James Cook made three voyages to the Pacific, mapping many islands. His exploration of Eastern Australia was particularly impactful as it led to the founding of towns on the coast, which was close to many of the Pacific Islands.³

By the 19th century, European powers began to more actively claim sovereignty over various Pacific islands. The "Scramble for the Pacific" saw European powers seeking to extend their influence over the region through a combination of naval power, treaties, and colonization.⁴ British imperial interests dominated the eastern Pacific, particularly in New Zealand, Australia, and the Fiji Islands, while France focused on the western and central Pacific, including New Caledonia and Tahiti. In Australia, the arrival of the British led to the forceful displacement of Aboriginal peoples and the introduction of policies that sought to eradicate or "civilize" them. In New Zealand, Māori land was confiscated and led to much cultural disruption through the forced expulsions afterwards. France's colonial presence in the Pacific was particularly aggressive, and by the late 19th century, they had "claimed" several island groups. French colonial rule brought both economic exploitation and forced religious conversion to the indigenous peoples. In areas, such as Tahiti, French settlers dominated the land and resources, while indigenous social structures were systematically dismantled.

² Francis James West and Sophie Foster, "Pacific Islands | Countries, Map, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, December 17, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Islands>.

³ Foster and West, "Pacific Islands | Countries, Map, & Facts."

⁴ Dijk, Kees van. *Pacific Strife*. Amsterdam University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15nmjw8>.

The impact of colonialism on the indigenous peoples of the Pacific was profound. Indigenous communities were subjected to the imposition of foreign systems, land dispossession, and exploitation of their natural resources. Indigenous people were often relegated to lower social and economic positions within their own societies, as the European settlers established a new colonial elite. While colonial authorities often justified their actions under the guise of “civilizing” missions, the result was the disruption of traditional ways of life and social structures. Land, which had been central to Pacific Islander identities, was frequently taken from indigenous people to make way for European settlers, plantations, or extractive industries. The introduction of European diseases, such as smallpox and influenza, also had catastrophic effects on indigenous populations, who lacked immunity to these foreign illnesses. In some places, entire island communities were wiped out.

One of the most visible and long-lasting effects of colonialism in the Pacific was the imposition of European languages. Colonial powers made their respective languages the official means of administration, trade, and education. In many cases, indigenous languages were suppressed or relegated to informal, everyday use, while colonial languages became the dominant means of communication in government, schools, and churches. English became the official language of Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand, while French replaced indigenous languages in Polynesia and New Caledonia.

However indigenous resistance took many forms, ranging from armed conflict to more subtle forms of protest and negotiation. In Fiji, the indigenous people fought against British annexation in the 19th century, while in Samoa, a series of uprisings, including the Mau movement in the early 20th century, sought to end German and later New Zealand rule.⁵ In

⁵ Hemenstall, Peter J. “Resistance: Conservatism and Innovation.” In *Pacific Islanders Under German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance*, 201–12. ANU Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dgn5vg.18>.

Polynesia and New Caledonia, indigenous groups have continued to resist French rule, advocating for independence and greater autonomy through both political activism and direct action. Even where military resistance was not possible, communities preserved and revitalized their traditions, languages, and customs as acts of defiance against colonial imposition. The resilience of Pacific Island communities is also evident in their fight to retain sovereignty over their lands and natural resources. Many islanders viewed colonial land appropriations and resource exploitation as direct threats to their way of life. In the post-World War II era, the wave of decolonization movements inspired many Pacific Island nations to seek independence, as seen in the independence of countries like Papua New Guinea (1975) and the Solomon Islands (1978), with other territories continuing their struggles for self-determination.⁶

Colonialism in the Pacific Islands was marked by exploitation, displacement, and the erosion of indigenous cultures. Yet, despite these profound challenges faced by Pacific Islanders, many communities resisted colonial rule and fought for their rights, cultures, and lands. The legacies of colonialism continue to shape the Pacific region today, but the resilience and strength of indigenous peoples remain central to their efforts to preserve and revitalize their cultures, assert their sovereignty, and navigate the complexities of a post-colonial world.

Modern Day Colonialism & the Importance of Land

In the contemporary world, colonialism often manifests in subtler forms, as global powers continue to exert influence over small island nations in the Pacific. While formal colonization may have ended in the mid-20th century, the legacies of imperialism persist, particularly in the context of land rights, resource exploitation, and sovereignty. In the Pacific,

⁶ Foster and West, “Pacific Islands | Countries, Map, & Facts.”

land is not just a physical asset; it holds profound cultural, spiritual, and political significance, making it a central issue in the region's struggle for self-determination and justice.

For Pacific Islanders, land is sacred; it is the physical manifestation of ancestral ties and spiritual connection. The concept of “Vanua” in Fiji, “‘Aina” in Hawai’i, and “Motu” in Papua New Guinea highlights how the land is seen as an ancestral gift that must be cared for and passed down through generations.⁷ However the struggle for land and sovereignty in the Pacific is not just about resisting foreign exploitation but also about asserting the rights of indigenous peoples to control their resources and protect their way of life. Efforts to reclaim land and resist foreign exploitation often intersect with broader movements for environmental justice, as indigenous knowledge systems are seen as vital to protecting the land from further degradation.

International solidarity and recognition of Pacific nations’ rights to self-determination and sustainable development are crucial to addressing the challenges of modern-day colonialism. Global institutions like the United Nations and regional bodies like the Pacific Islands Forum have played roles in supporting the sovereignty of Pacific nations and pushing for reforms that ensure land and resources are managed in ways that benefit local populations, rather than outside interests.⁸ Specifically, the Pacific Islands Forum has been creating Peace & Security declarations since 1992 on respecting members and non-members sovereignty as well as recognizing the unique issues that affect the region and its people.⁹

⁷ “Pacific Food Guide | Food and Land,” n.d., [https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/pacificfoodguide/index.php/about-the-guide/food-and-land/#:~:text=Land%20was%20believed%20to%20be,lives%20\(Pollock%2C%201992\).](https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/pacificfoodguide/index.php/about-the-guide/food-and-land/#:~:text=Land%20was%20believed%20to%20be,lives%20(Pollock%2C%201992).)

⁸ “United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022,” n.d., <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-pacific-strategy-2018-2022>.

⁹ “Peace and Security | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,” n.d., <https://forumsec.org/peace-and-security>.

Current Efforts of Preservation

Despite these challenges, there are numerous initiatives underway to preserve and revitalize native cultures, languages, and practices across the Pacific. Many Pacific Island nations are implementing language revitalization programs that focus on both the preservation of endangered languages and the promotion of multilingual education. In New Zealand, for example, the Māori language has been brought back into public life through initiatives like Te Reo Māori language courses, television programs, and government policies that support bilingual education.¹⁰ Pacific communities are also using modern technology to preserve and teach languages, with digital archives, apps, and online resources being developed to make language learning more accessible.

Across the Pacific, there are also efforts to preserve traditional knowledge and practices. In Fiji, the revival of traditional navigation practices, such as the art of wayfinding, is helping younger generations reconnect with their seafaring heritage. In the Solomon Islands, communities are working together to protect sacred sites and ensure that traditional knowledge about medicinal plants, agriculture, and fishing is passed down to younger generations. Many Pacific Islanders are taking control of their cultural preservation by establishing community-based initiatives that foster a sense of pride and belonging. These initiatives often involve elders and traditional leaders who pass down customs, stories, and songs to the younger generation. Cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and traditional music and dance performances also serve as important vehicles for cultural expression and education.

On the global stage, Pacific nations have been vocal in advocating for the preservation of indigenous cultures and languages, both within their own countries and across the world. The

¹⁰ “History of the Māori Language,” September 16, 2024, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/maori-language-week/history-of-the-maori-language>.

Pacific Islands Forum, UNESCO, and other international organizations are working to raise awareness about the importance of indigenous cultures and to support the implementation of policies that protect these heritages. As recent as 2023, UNESCO and the Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) have built programs (Pacific Regional World Heritage Workplan) designed to aid countries in preserving their culture and local heritage sites.¹¹ The Pacific Heritage Hub, a subcommittee of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, also hopes to develop a Pacific native steering committee to provide resources in preservation and heritage areas such as archeology, environmental management, community development, and history.¹² Another large step taken by the UN, that has been largely supported by Pacific Islanders, is the translation of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders into native Pacific languages.¹³ By doing this the UN is globally recognizing these languages and sites and empowering natives in countries across the Pacific.

Preserving native culture, language, and practices in the Pacific requires a multifaceted approach that combines respect for traditional knowledge with modern tools and frameworks. Strengthening the role of indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary challenges; whether in climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, or health care; can enhance cultural resilience. By empowering communities to take control of their cultural heritage, Pacific Islanders can ensure that their traditions, languages, and practices continue to thrive for future generations.

Ultimately, the preservation of Pacific cultures is not just about protecting the past; it is about ensuring that these cultures have a future. By reconnecting with the land, reviving languages, and celebrating traditional practices, the people of the Pacific are reaffirming their

¹¹ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Building Momentum for World Heritage in the Pacific,” n.d., <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2689>.

¹² “Pacific Heritage Hub | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” December 17, 2021, <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/pacific-heritage-hub>.

¹³ Fiji One News, “Pacific Languages Embrace UN Human Rights Declaration,” February 20, 2024, <https://fjionenews.com.fj/pacific-languages-embrace-un-human-rights-declaration/>.

identity, resilience, and ability to navigate the complexities of the modern world while honoring the wisdom of their ancestors.

Conclusion

The preservation of native practices, languages, and cultural heritage sites in the Pacific is not merely an act of safeguarding the past; it is a fundamental means of ensuring the survival and empowerment of indigenous communities in the present and future. As the Pacific Islands continue to confront challenges such as globalization, environmental degradation, and the ongoing legacies of colonialism, the need to protect these traditions becomes ever more urgent.

The ongoing efforts to preserve and promote native cultural heritage in the Pacific are a testament to the determination of indigenous peoples. But these efforts cannot succeed in isolation. They require the active support of governments, international organizations, and global communities to create frameworks that respect indigenous sovereignty, promote cultural education, and mitigate threats that undermine cultural integrity. Bodies like this Council, the UN, and the Pacific Island Forum aid in providing a unified platform for indigenous voices. This council can help ensure that these communities are represented in regional decision-making processes and foster collaboration between Pacific Island nations and global organizations. As an advocate for all Pacific nations they can garner international recognition of indigenous rights. Importantly, the council can also support indigenous populations in their ongoing struggles for self-determination, sovereignty, and autonomy, ensuring that their voices are central in shaping the future of the Pacific region. Through solidarity and targeted initiatives, these bodies can empower indigenous communities to thrive while safeguarding their lands, cultures, and traditions for future generations.

Guiding Questions

- What are the primary threats to the preservation of native practices, languages, and cultural heritage sites?
- Who has the authority to decide how indigenous practices, languages, and heritage sites are preserved and used?
- How can international support respect and amplify indigenous control over their cultural practices and heritage sites?
- What are the ethical implications of outsiders intervening in the preservation of native practices or sites?
- Are there tensions between preserving traditional practices and integrating modern technologies or lifestyles?



Topic B: Impacts of Modernization in the Pacific

Introduction

The Pacific Islands, known for their rich cultural diversity and centuries-old traditions, are currently undergoing profound transformations driven by modernization. Modernization, often defined by technological advancements, economic globalization, urbanization, and social changes, has had both positive and negative consequences for Pacific island nations.¹⁴ While modernization has brought economic growth, improved infrastructure, and increased access to global markets, it has also posed significant challenges to the preservation of indigenous cultures, social structures, and the environment.

As these islands become increasingly integrated into the global economy, they face a delicate balance between embracing the benefits of modernization and protecting their traditional ways of life. The influx of foreign investment, the growth of tourism, the spread of Western education systems, and the proliferation of digital technologies all present both opportunities and risks for the future of Pacific societies. It is important to note Pacific islanders are not passive recipients of change but active agents shaping the future of their societies. While some embrace modernization as a pathway to development and prosperity, others seek to preserve indigenous knowledge, traditional governance, and sustainable practices in ways that respond to contemporary challenges. The tension between tradition and progress, global integration and local autonomy, remains one of the most defining features of the modern Pacific experience.

¹⁴ Krishan Kumar, "Modernization | Nature, Features, Examples, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, October 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/modernization>.

Economic and Environmental Challenges

The economic impacts of modernization in the Pacific are multifaceted. While modernization has contributed to economic growth in certain sectors such as tourism, trade, and infrastructure development; it has also resulted in increased dependence on external economies and global markets. This economic shift has often undermined traditional livelihoods, such as sustainable agriculture, local fishing, and native handcrafts, which are central to the cultural and economic well-being of Pacific communities.

Pacific Island nations are facing challenges of economic diversification. Many rely heavily on primary industries such as commercial agriculture, fishing, and mining, which are often vulnerable to global market fluctuations and environmental pressures. For example, countries like Papua New Guinea and Fiji depend on the export of natural resources, while tourism is a critical industry for others like Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu.¹⁵ While tourism can bring significant revenue, it is often concentrated in urban areas or tourist hotspots, and the economic benefits do not always trickle down to local communities, leading to unequal development. This dependency often leads to an imbalance of power, where foreign governments and multinational corporations control much of the wealth and resources, leaving indigenous peoples with little control over their economic futures. Furthermore, the push for economic development sometimes comes at the cost of traditional ways of life, with large-scale agricultural projects or mining operations displacing communities and damaging local ecosystems.

The most pressing environmental challenge faced by Pacific Island nations due to modernization is the impact of climate change. Small island states in the Pacific are among the

¹⁵ Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, “Pacific Islands Economies: Trade Patterns and Some Observations on Trade Policy Issues | Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability.”

most vulnerable in the world to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and environmental disruptions. Climate change poses an existential threat to these islands, with many low-lying nations such as the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and Kiribati at risk of becoming uninhabitable due to rising seas.¹⁶ These nations contribute only a fraction of global carbon emissions but are disproportionately affected by the consequences of industrialization and environmental degradation driven by larger, more developed nations.

In addition to climate change, resource exploitation driven by modernization poses significant environmental risks. The Pacific Islands' ecosystems, ranging from coral reefs to rainforests, are increasingly threatened by activities such as deforestation, mining, overfishing, and the expansion of agriculture. Large-scale development projects, including tourism resorts, oil extraction, and logging, often lead to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and destruction of sacred or ecologically significant areas.

On the other hand, there are emerging examples of more sustainable development models that integrate traditional knowledge with modern solutions. In Fiji, for example, the "blue economy" model seeks to balance economic growth with marine conservation, recognizing the vital importance of oceans and coastal resources for both local economies and cultural practices.¹⁷ Similarly, the concept of "community-driven development" in places like Vanuatu emphasizes local decision-making and the incorporation of indigenous practices into modern governance and environmental management.¹⁸

¹⁶ "NASA Analysis Shows Irreversible Sea Level Rise for Pacific Islands," NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), n.d., <https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/nasa-analysis-shows-irreversible-sea-level-rise-for-pacific-islands/>.

¹⁷ Espooneer, "A Shared Vision for Fiji's Sustainable Blue Economy Unites Key Stakeholders," *Blue Prosperity Fiji* (blog), May 21, 2024, <https://www.blueprosperityfiji.org/post/a-shared-vision-for-fiji-s-sustainable-blue-economy-unites-key-stakeholders>.

¹⁸ "On The Frontlines of Climate Change: Financing the Largest Community-based Adaptation Project in Vanuatu - Vanuatu," ReliefWeb, May 12, 2023,

While modernization has brought tangible benefits such as infrastructure development, technological progress, and economic growth; it has also led to the erosion of traditional cultures, dependency on external markets, and environmental degradation. The key to overcoming these challenges lies in finding a path forward that blends modern development with respect for indigenous cultures and environmental sustainability.

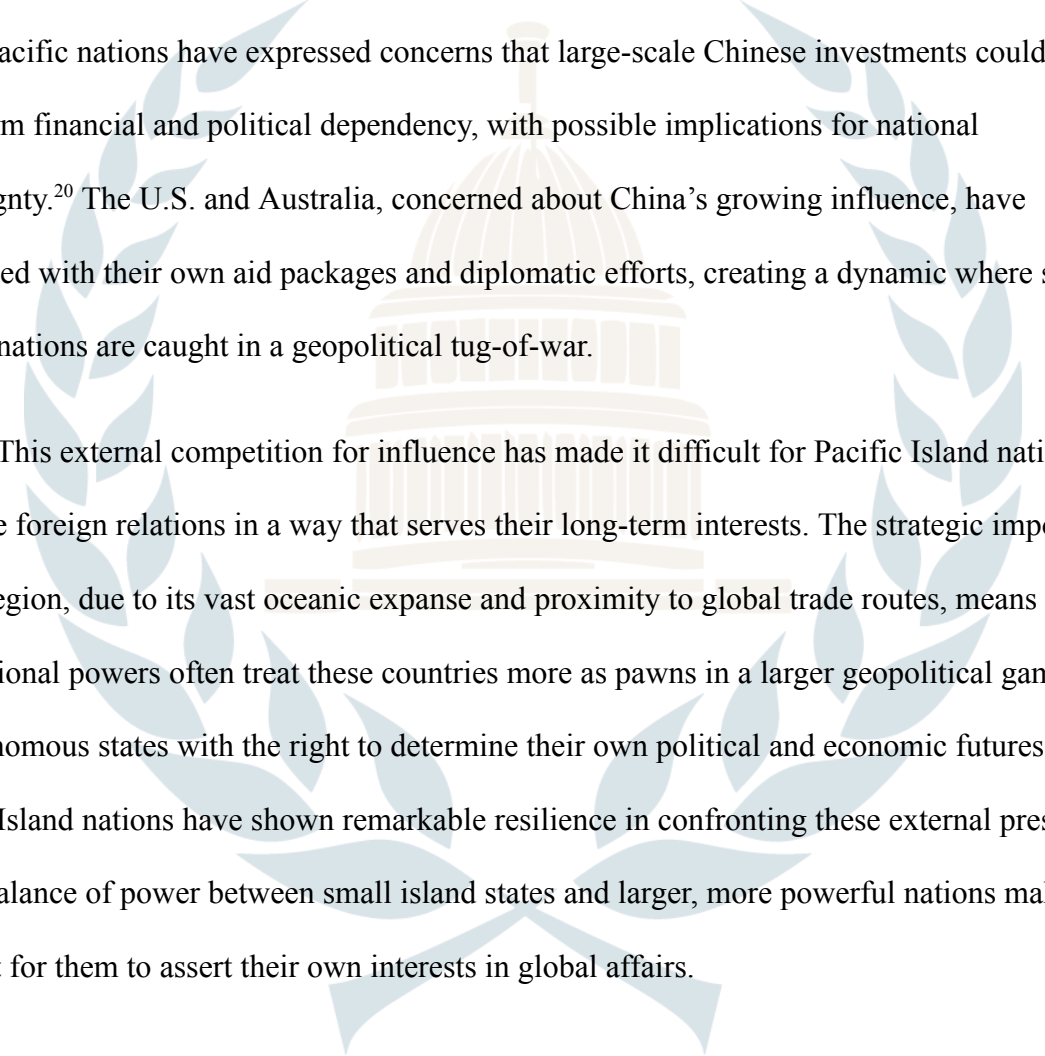
Pressure from the International Community

Outside pressures from the international community are another significant challenge facing the Pacific Islands. Many Pacific Island nations have small, export-dependent economies, often focused on natural resources, tourism, and foreign aid. As a result, they are highly susceptible to fluctuations in global trade, the policies of multinational corporations, and the priorities of donor countries. In many cases, Pacific Island economies are beholden to the interests of foreign powers, which have historically used the region for strategic military, commercial, and resource extraction purposes.

The dependence on foreign aid, often from former colonial powers or larger, developed nations, creates an economic dynamic where island nations are subject to the conditions attached to this aid. These conditions can include political reforms, economic policies, and even the promotion of free-market approaches that may not align with local needs or cultural values.¹⁹ Economic aid packages can be seen as a double-edged sword; helping in the short-term but contributing to long-term dependency on international donors and reducing the autonomy of Pacific nations in charting their own economic futures.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/frontlines-climate-change-financing-largest-community-based-adaptation-project-vanuatu>.

¹⁹ Matthew Dornan and Jonathan Pryke, “Foreign Aid to the Pacific: Trends and Developments in the Twenty-First Century,” *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 3 (July 18, 2017): 386–404, <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.185>.



The Pacific has also become a focal point in the broader geopolitical competition between major powers, particularly between the United States, China, and Australia. For decades, the U.S. and Australia have exerted influence over Pacific Island countries, while in recent years, China has increased its presence in the region, offering development aid, infrastructure projects, and investments in return for political allegiance and strategic access. Some Pacific nations have expressed concerns that large-scale Chinese investments could lead to long-term financial and political dependency, with possible implications for national sovereignty.²⁰ The U.S. and Australia, concerned about China’s growing influence, have responded with their own aid packages and diplomatic efforts, creating a dynamic where smaller Pacific nations are caught in a geopolitical tug-of-war.

This external competition for influence has made it difficult for Pacific Island nations to navigate foreign relations in a way that serves their long-term interests. The strategic importance of the region, due to its vast oceanic expanse and proximity to global trade routes, means that international powers often treat these countries more as pawns in a larger geopolitical game than as autonomous states with the right to determine their own political and economic futures. While Pacific Island nations have shown remarkable resilience in confronting these external pressures, the imbalance of power between small island states and larger, more powerful nations makes it difficult for them to assert their own interests in global affairs.

Cultural Erosion & Urbanization

Modernization, while often associated with progress and development, has brought significant challenges to the cultural integrity of Pacific Island nations. The rapid influx of global

²⁰ Jonathan Pryke, “The Risks of China’s Ambitions in the South Pacific,” *Brookings*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-risks-of-chinas-ambitions-in-the-south-pacific/>.

influences through technology, Western education, urbanization, and the expansion of market economies has led to a process of cultural erosion in many parts of the Pacific. This phenomenon, marked by the loss or transformation of indigenous customs, languages, and ways of life, raises important questions about how modernization can coexist with cultural preservation in the Pacific region.

At the heart of cultural erosion in the Pacific is the gradual disappearance of traditional knowledge systems. For thousands of years, Pacific Island communities have relied on systems of knowledge that are deeply connected to their natural environments, passed down orally through generations. Indigenous practices related to navigation, agriculture, fishing, and health have been essential to the survival and thriving of these communities. Traditional practices such as fishing using hand lines or navigating the open ocean without modern instruments are increasingly under threat as younger generations are drawn into urban life, where formal education systems prioritize Western knowledge.²¹

With the rise of modern technology, many of these indigenous practices have become less relevant in everyday life. As a result, there is a growing divide between rural and urban populations in terms of access to traditional knowledge. Younger people, particularly in urban centers, are increasingly disconnected from the land and the cultural practices tied to it, opting for consumer lifestyles that favor imported goods over locally sourced, culturally significant resources.²² As these younger generations migrate to cities in search of better education and employment opportunities, traditional village life is increasingly undermined. Rural areas experience depopulation, leading to a loss of intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the

²¹ “Cultural Unity and Heritage: The Role of FestPAC in the Pacific Islands | CSIS.”

²² “Cultural Unity and Heritage: The Role of FestPAC in the Pacific Islands | CSIS.”

breakdown of familial and community networks. In urban settings, the pressures of modern life, including the pursuit of personal success, often lead to the erosion of collective values such as respect for elders, communal decision-making, and sustainable resource management.

Globalization, through the spread of Western media, multinational corporations, and global trade, has had a profound impact on the cultural landscape of the Pacific. Western ideals of individual success, material wealth, and the pursuit of consumer goods have found their way into even the most remote island communities. While these new influences may bring benefits like improved infrastructure or access to technology, they also come at the cost of traditional values that prioritize communal well-being, sustainability, and a deep connection to the land.

Overcoming Challenges and Current Policies

A Pacific Islands council can play a critical role in helping these nations navigate the delicate process of modernization while safeguarding their cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and sovereignty. By working together, member nations can share best practices for integrating modern technologies and systems in ways that do not undermine indigenous knowledge or cultural values. For example, modern technology can be harnessed to support traditional agriculture, enhance climate resilience, or preserve endangered languages. Similarly, education systems can be adapted to incorporate both modern and indigenous knowledge, empowering younger generations to embrace their heritage while also preparing them for a globalized world.

A unified Pacific Islands council can also serve as a counterbalance to external pressures by advocating for the region's interests on the global stage. Through diplomacy and solidarity, the council can ensure that Pacific nations speak with a unified voice, negotiating better terms for

foreign investments, trade agreements, and aid. Moreover, the council can work to strengthen regional autonomy, resisting outside influence that threatens the region’s political independence or economic self-sufficiency. By creating a cohesive political and economic bloc, the council can help Pacific Island nations assert their right to self-determination and control over their natural resources, ensuring that foreign powers do not undermine local governance.

Currently there are a few policies and agreements in place to aid these nations in navigating challenges of modernization. The Pacific Island Forum has created the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy (PAfTS) in order to increase regional trade and aid developing Pacific nations in creating the infrastructure needed to compete on a global scale.²³ They are also working to develop sustainable and resilient economic policies from natural resources such as the ocean as part of their 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.²⁴ The UN has also developed The United Nations Pacific Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), a framework aimed at uplifting these nations. The UNSDCF, created by Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, works hand and hand with the Blue Continent Strategy while also taking into account the Territories of the Pacific and unique challenges faced in regional development.²⁵ This is a perfect example of a global body giving these Pacific nations control over their policies and sovereignty, as well as placing it on a global scale for all to recognize.

Ultimately, a Pacific Islands council provides a crucial platform for navigating the complex dynamics of modernization and global interference. By uniting the region’s diverse nations around common goals such as sustainability, cultural preservation, economic equity, and

²³ “Growing Pacific Trade | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,” n.d., <https://forumsec.org/growing-pacific-trade>.

²⁴ “2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,” n.d., <https://forumsec.org/2050>.

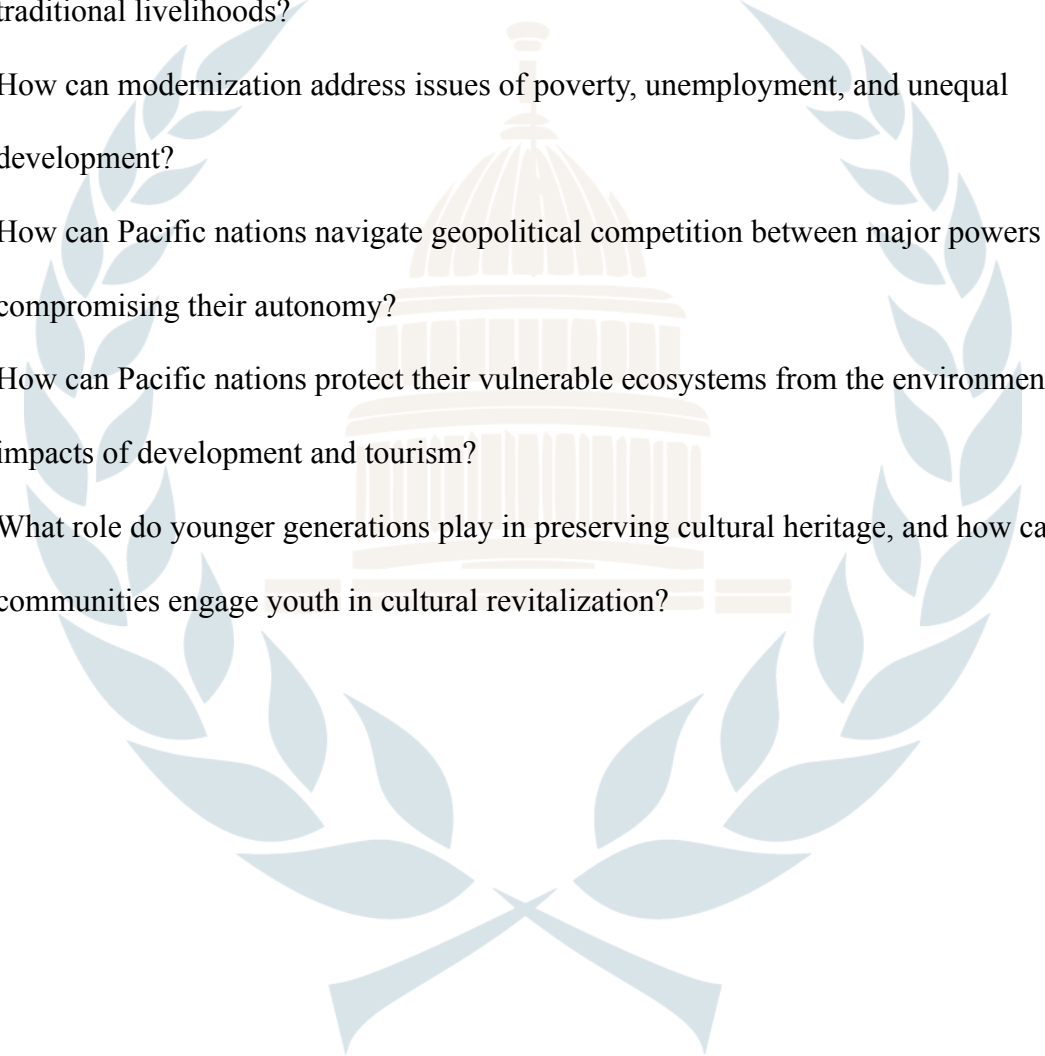
²⁵ “United Nations Pacific Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027,” Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, n.d., <https://pacific.un.org/en/237313-united-nations-pacific-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2023-2027>

political sovereignty. This council can help Pacific Islanders address the challenges of modernization while safeguarding their autonomy. Through collective action, the council can amplify the voices of Pacific Island nations, ensuring that their priorities are respected in the face of both global pressures and the forces of change.

Conclusion

As Pacific Island nations grapple with the forces of globalization, technological advancements, and shifting global power dynamics, they face both significant opportunities and considerable challenges. Modernization has brought improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, and education, and it has opened doors for economic growth, particularly in tourism, trade, and digital connectivity. However, these advances often come at a steep price, especially in terms of cultural erosion, environmental degradation, and growing dependence on external forces. However, it is important to recognize that modernization does not represent an inevitable path of decline for Pacific Island nations. The resilience and adaptability of Pacific peoples are key to navigating the pressures of modernization. Across the region, there are growing movements to revive indigenous practices, protect cultural heritage, and develop sustainable models of growth that blend modern innovation with traditional wisdom.

Guiding Questions

- Can Pacific nations diversify their economies without becoming overly reliant on external markets and foreign aid?
 - Should there be limits to economic growth in order to preserve the environment and traditional livelihoods?
 - How can modernization address issues of poverty, unemployment, and unequal development?
 - How can Pacific nations navigate geopolitical competition between major powers without compromising their autonomy?
 - How can Pacific nations protect their vulnerable ecosystems from the environmental impacts of development and tourism?
 - What role do younger generations play in preserving cultural heritage, and how can communities engage youth in cultural revitalization?
- 

Work Cited

“Cultural Unity and Heritage: The Role of FestPAC in the Pacific Islands | CSIS,” n.d.

<https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/cultural-unity-and-heritage-role-festpac-pacific-islands>.

Dijk, Kees van. *Pacific Strife*. Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15nmjw8>.

Dornan, Matthew, and Jonathan Pryke. “Foreign Aid to the Pacific: Trends and Developments in the Twenty-First Century.” *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 3 (July 18, 2017): 386–404. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.185>.

Espooner. “A Shared Vision for Fiji’s Sustainable Blue Economy Unites Key Stakeholders.” *Blue Prosperity Fiji* (blog), May 21, 2024.

<https://www.blueprosperityfiji.org/post/a-shared-vision-for-fiji-s-sustainable-blue-economy-unites-key-stakeholders>.

FijiOne News. “Pacific Languages Embrace UN Human Rights Declaration,” February 20 2024.

<https://fijionenews.com.fj/pacific-languages-embrace-un-human-rights-declaration/>.

Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. “United Nations Pacific Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027,” n.d.

<https://pacific.un.org/en/237313-united-nations-pacific-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2023-2027>.

West, Francis James, and Sophie Foster. “Pacific Islands | Countries, Map, & Facts.”

Encyclopedia Britannica, December 17, 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Islands>.

“Growing Pacific Trade | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,” n.d.

<https://forumsec.org/growing-pacific-trade>.

Halperin, Sandra. “Neocolonialism | Definition, Examples, & Facts.” Encyclopedia Britannica,

October 16, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism>.

Hempenstall, Peter J. “Resistance: Conservatism and Innovation.” In Pacific Islanders Under

German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance, 201–12. ANU Press,

2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dgn5vg.18>.

Kumar, Krishan. “Modernization | Nature, Features, Examples, & Facts.” Encyclopedia

Britannica, October 9, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/modernization>.

NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). “NASA Analysis Shows Irreversible Sea Level Rise for Pacific Islands,” n.d.

<https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/nasa-analysis-shows-irreversible-sea-level-rise-for-pacific-islands/>.

Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability. “Pacific Islands Economies: Trade Patterns and

Some Observations on Trade Policy Issues | Nautilus Institute for Security and

Sustainability.” Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability | We Hold That It Is

Possible to Build Peace, Create Security, and Restore Sustainability for All People in Our

Time., July 31, 2015.

<https://nautilus.org/trade-and-environment/pacific-islands-economies-trade-patterns-and-some-observations-on-trade-policy-issues-4/>.

NZ History. “History of the Maori Language,” September 2024.

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/maori-language-week/history-of-the-maori-language>.

“Pacific Food Guide | Food and Land,” n.d.

[https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/pacificfoodguide/index.php/about-the-guide/food-and-land/#:~:text=Land%20was%20believed%20to%20be,lives%20\(Pollock%2C%201992\).](https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/pacificfoodguide/index.php/about-the-guide/food-and-land/#:~:text=Land%20was%20believed%20to%20be,lives%20(Pollock%2C%201992).)

“Pacific Heritage Hub | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” December 17, 2021.

<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/pacific-heritage-hub>.

“Peace and Security | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,” n.d.

<https://forumsec.org/peace-and-security>.

Pryke, Jonathan. “The Risks of China’s Ambitions in the South Pacific.” Brookings, July 20, 2020.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-risks-of-chinas-ambitions-in-the-south-pacific/>.

“2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat,” n.d.

<https://forumsec.org/2050>.

UNESCO World Heritage Convention. “Building Momentum for World Heritage in the Pacific,” May 2024. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2689>.

“United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022,” n.d.

<https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-pacific-strategy-2018-2022>.

U.S. Department of The Interior. “OIA Blogs: Who Are Pacific Islanders? | U.S. Department of the Interior,” n.d. <https://www.doi.gov/oia/Who-are-Pacific-Islanders>.

West, Francis James, and Sophie Foster. “Pacific Islands | Countries, Map, & Facts,” 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Islands/Independence-movements>.