



WALKING TOGETHER IN PARTNERSHIP: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF LOCALISATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION RESEARCH IN THE PACIFIC

PACIFIC ISLANDS ASSOCIATION OF NGOS
AND HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP

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This paper is part of Humanitarian Advisory Group's *Intention to impact: Localisation of humanitarian action in the Pacific* research project.



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About Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations

The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO) is the major regional NGO with membership in the 23 countries and territories of the Pacific Islands. For over 25 years PIANGO has served the Pacific through strengthening and building the capacity of the civil society sector. This is through giving the sector a voice for policy formulation and development, and strengthening National Liaison Units (NLUs) or the umbrella organisations in member countries.

About Humanitarian Advisory Group

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Partnership for research impact

PIANGO and HAG are partnering on this research on localisation in the Pacific. Working together increases reach and influence across the region. HAG and PIANGO previously produced a paper outlining Pacific priorities for measuring change, and 4 localisation baselines in Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji and the Solomon Islands.

PIANGO has a strong civil society network of organisations involved in humanitarian preparedness and response in the Pacific and has been involved in promoting localisation initiatives and perspectives in national, regional and global forums. PIANGO was actively involved in the Pacific lead-up to the World Humanitarian Summit.

HAG is undertaking a three-year research initiative called Humanitarian Horizons. The first project in the Humanitarian Horizons research program is Intention to Impact: The Localisation of Humanitarian Action. This project explores the action and impact of localised approaches to humanitarian action with a focus on 4 case study countries in the Pacific. The project aims to generate tools and approaches to measure localisation that can be adopted and used to inform humanitarian programming.

This research is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

WALKING TOGETHER IN PARTNERSHIP

Working in partnership is a journey. The path we take and how we walk together on it are as important as the destination. Three years ago, the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) embarked on a journey together: to explore progress on locally led humanitarian action in the Pacific. Our partnership was founded on the idea that it was both possible to track progress on localisation, and to influence change using the research evidence, with Pacific researchers and partners leading the way.

The research draws on Fijian values of 'duavata' meaning togetherness and unity. This refers to the unity between HAG and PIANGO in forging this partnership.

This paper explores our successes, our challenges and our learning about partnership and research impact with the aim of promoting more equitable knowledge production and exchange in the humanitarian sector. While it draws on research, it is primarily a learning and reflective piece.

It conveys our commitment to hold ourselves accountable, uphold best practice for conducting localised research, and be transparent. We have learned along the way and continue to identify ways we can strengthen our collaboration.

Working together in partnership has increased the reach and influence of the localisation research across the region and the likelihood of research uptake and use.

The paper has three objectives:

1. To explore the partnership between PIANGO, HAG and national NGO umbrella bodies, including factors such as partnership design, principled ways of working and local ownership and leadership
2. To examine the impact of HAG and PIANGO's localisation research in the Pacific, looking at how various stakeholders have used the evidence base and tools produced and how this has affected policy, discourse, or practice
3. To assess how the way we conducted the partnership has shaped the research impact

The paper first explores the partnership between HAG and PIANGO, including important principles and milestones. The second section examines the partnership's emerging impact at a regional level and in 4 case study countries (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), followed by a summary of enabling and challenging factors. It concludes with an outline of future steps.

Where the data came from



10 Documents reviewed



1 HAG PIANGO partnership workshop



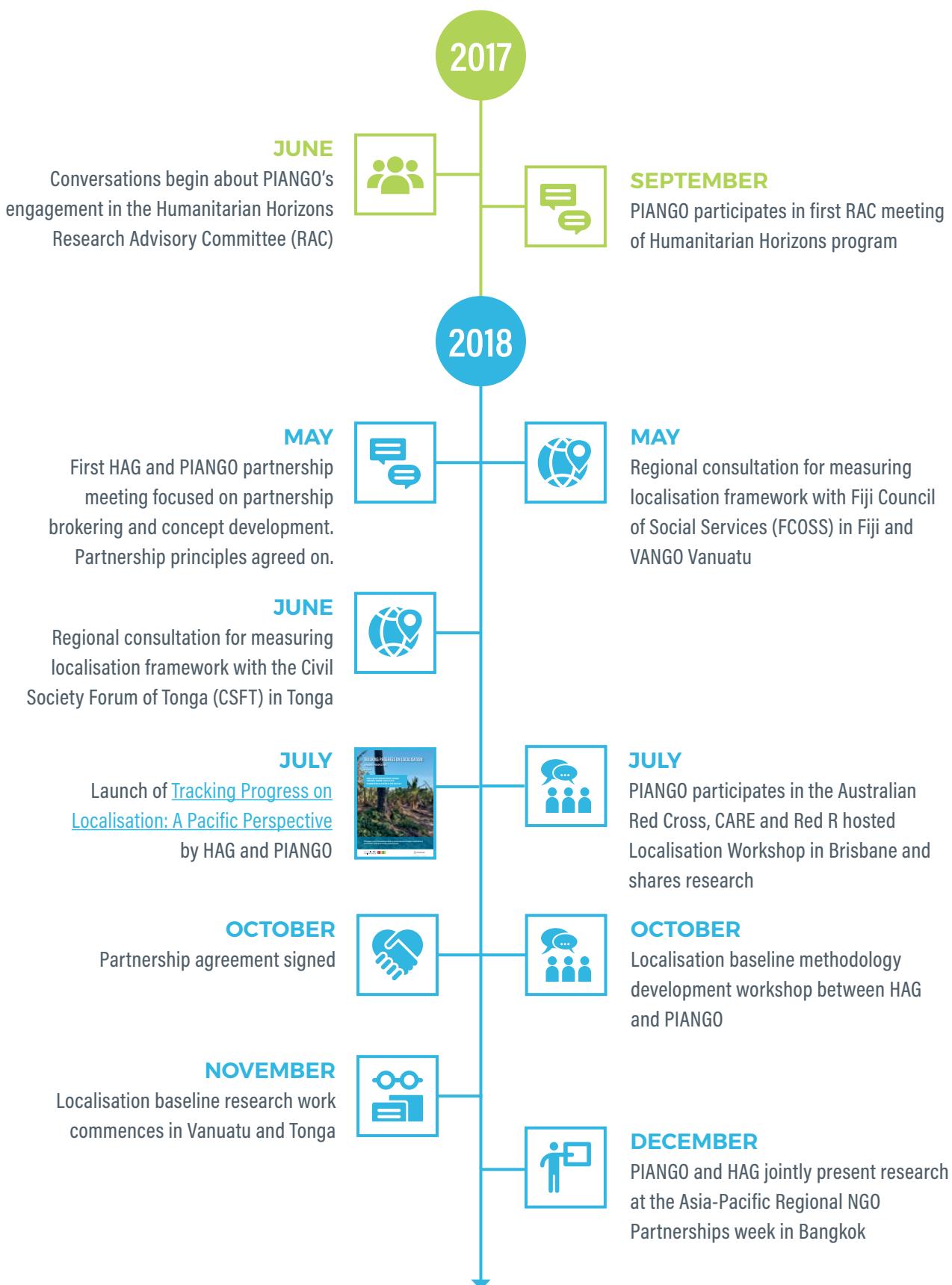
10 Case study interviews

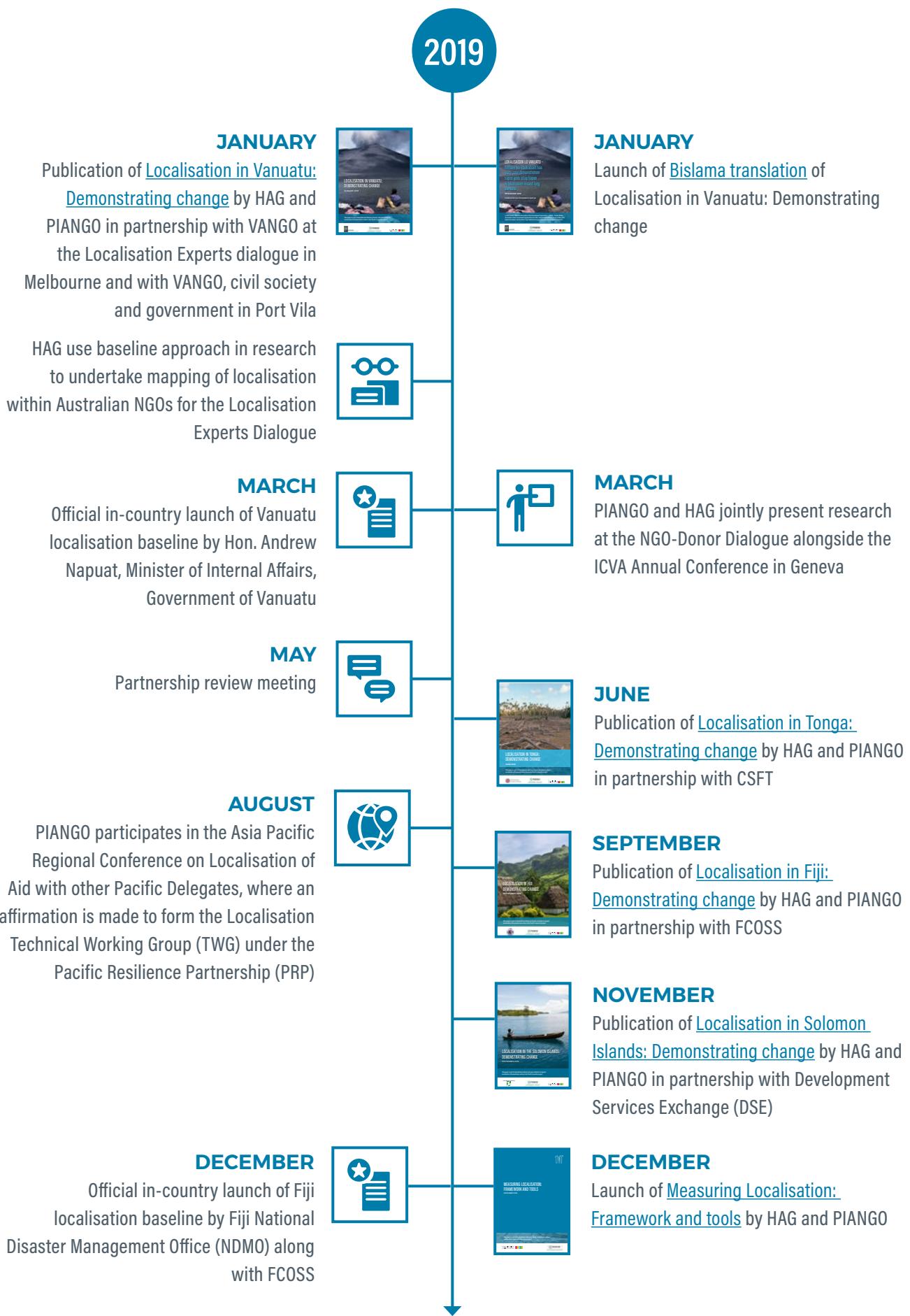
ABOUT THIS PAPER

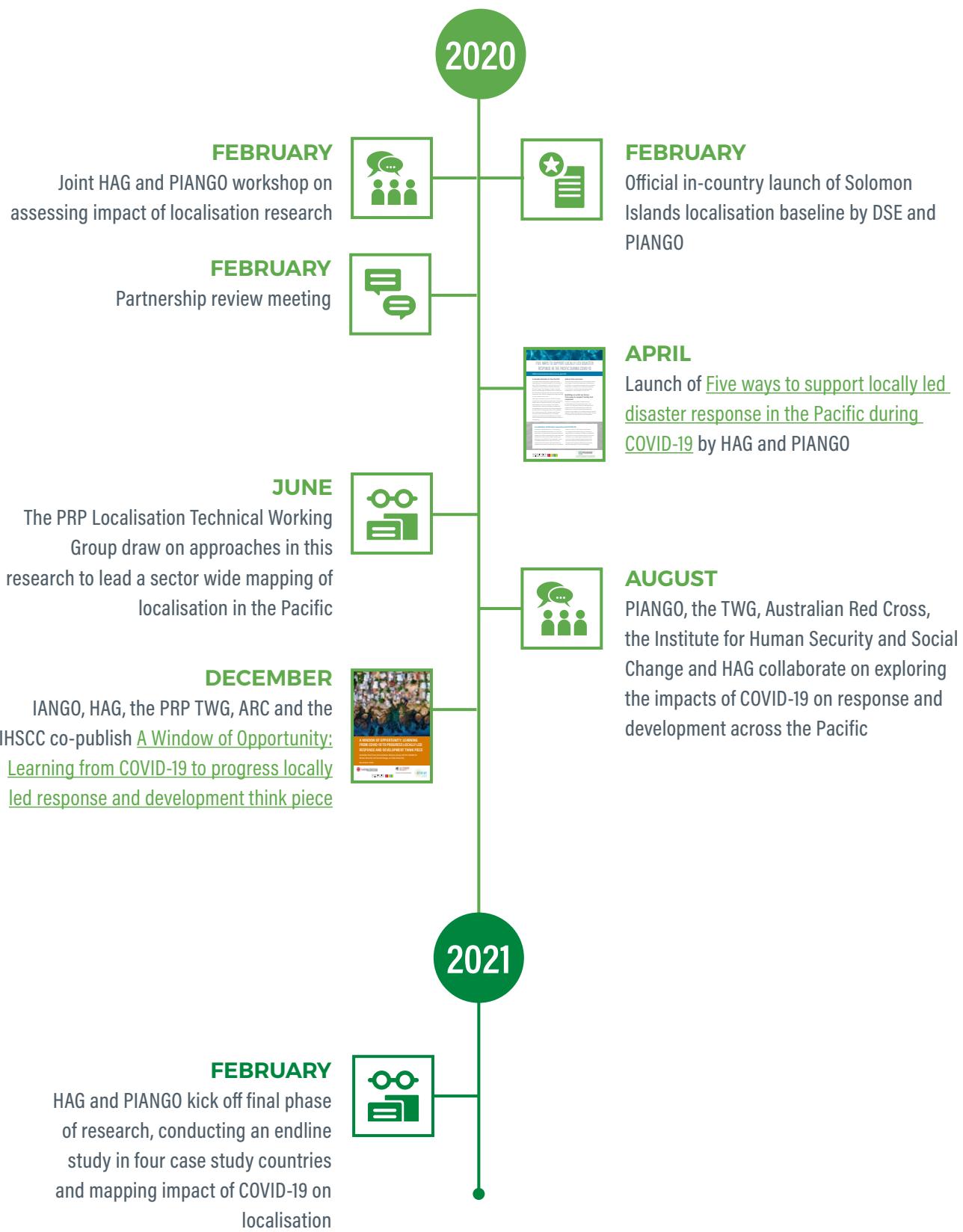
This paper sits within HAG and PIANGO's joint work on the *Intention to Impact: Localisation of Humanitarian Action* stream the [Humanitarian Horizons](#) 2018-2021 research program. As we move into the final phase of the project, this paper reflects on how we developed our partnership and what this has meant for the project's impact to date.

The research process for this reflective paper involved qualitative analysis of external and internal feedback and reflection. We held a joint workshop to map the journey and impact of the HAG and PIANGO partnership, while PIANGO worked with its National Liaison Units (NLUs) to capture their experiences and input. HAG's Pacific Associate Linda Kenni managed the data collection in Vanuatu. HAG and PIANGO also relied on previous records maintained to identify research impact and use.

Partnership Journey - Timeline of key events









Tanna Island, Vanuatu. Kersom Richard, Ni-Van Photography.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

PIANGO and HAG began discussions about developing a partnership together in 2017. Initially, the processes to develop the partnership centred around creating a shared vision for the partnership and exploring our complementary strengths, even before we began to discuss research design and methodology. We were brought together by the spark of an idea for a research project on localisation in the Pacific through the Humanitarian Horizons program. But the intention from the outset was to build a long-term, deeper partnership based on principles and trust, as outlined in the partnership principles below (see page 10). We also set out to pilot different ways of working together on research that supported broader localisation objectives and principles, and in particular for HAG as the international partner to hold ourselves accountable for ‘walking the talk.’

We agreed to test our partnership in a first phase of research and the collaboration was formalised through a high-level partnership agreement in October 2018 (see Partnership Journey timeline on pages 5 to 7 for this and other milestones). Over the following three years, the partnership deepened and expanded – we now consider our relationship to be broader than just conducting research for formally agreed outputs. We have worked together on multiple different initiatives across the Pacific, and regularly share our skills, networks and knowledge outside of formal, funded activities.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP

“When there was an issue, it was about us coming together and having an honest conversation to allow us to move forward. Really listening and doing something about it.”¹

“At HAG, we knew we would make mistakes because we were learning as we moved forward with the partnership. But the partnership with PIANGO allows us to be open about things, and take lessons from these occasions.”²

From the start we invested in spending time together and allowed space for a growing mutual understanding to shape what our partnership would look like. We agreed to commit to a partnership brokering process. Both partners contributing to shaping what this process would look like.

¹ HAG-PIANGO workshop.

² HAG-PIANGO workshop.



Planning: Both partners invested time in planning our partnership meeting and initial partnership development phase. We both wrote the agenda for the first meeting.



Setting the tone: We agreed this would be an open conversation, setting the tone for the partnership. We allowed space for raising challenging issues and agreed that we would address these constructively. We committed to acknowledging difficulties and mistakes and taking responsibility.



Developing principles: We agreed we would set principles that would guide the partnership.



Facilitation: PIANGO chose an external facilitator based in Suva to broker our first formal partnership meeting and to be an independent voice in the room.



Time: We set aside 1.5 days to sit together in person in Suva for the initial partnership brokering meeting to allow ourselves the time and space to engage in constructive discussion and for PIANGO to lead a talanoa process.



Resource investment: Both PIANGO and HAG agreed to invest resources in the process such as staff time in developing the partnership.



Review: Committing to and making time for regular partnership reviews on an annual basis was key.

Complementarity, mutual benefit and visibility

From the outset, both partners emphasised the importance of the relationship being based on exploring and using our complementary skillsets, knowledge and strengths, in particular for conducting research. We acknowledged openly at our partnership meetings that we each have different strengths and bring unique abilities. We recognised that these are of equal value and we resolved to always leverage these differences to further our research work. For example, PIANGO brings deep contextual knowledge, understanding of local and national communities, connections and networks across civil society and government, and conducting ethical research in the Pacific. HAG brings an international perspective, research and writing experience and connections outside of the region.

We also agreed that our work together would be based on drivers of mutual benefit. We spent time mapping these out, and agreed that any work we undertook in partnership would always be of value to both partners. Similarly, we agreed that a further ambition was to elevate each partner in our respective domains and we committed to always recognise, and communicate respectfully, about the partnership publicly. Depending on context, this may mean elevating partner visibility, co-branding outputs, co-hosting events, involving both partners in the dissemination of research or making sure that both partners are named even if only one is present.

PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

The partnership between HAG, PIANGO and the NLUs is based on the principles forged during initial consultations, which have created a sense of ownership over the joint research work. These were important in shaping our initial ways of working. Over time, the principles became embedded in our ways of working.

"When we started off, we discussed about a principle-based partnership. But once the relationship kicked off, it just continued to move forward at full pace. We didn't need to keep going back to the principles all the time."³



THE PARTIES EACH COMMITTED TO THE FOLLOWING PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES



TRANSFORMATIVE

This is not a partnership based on delivery of outputs or transactions; we seek to change dynamics, influence conversations and make positive changes in support of local leadership.



TRANSPARENT

We commit to sharing openly – on pertinent matters of finance, areas of collaboration, specific areas of work, relationships, communication under the shared localisation theme.



COMMITTED TO QUALITY

Upholding high-quality standards in all the work that we do together. We commit to raising concerns about quality issues if and when they arise so that they are resolved quickly and effectively, and to express concerns or suggested improvements in an open and positive manner, with both parties willing to give, accept and act on constructive feedback.



SUSTAINABLE

Committed to a long-term collaboration with broad geographic reach across the Pacific. Ensuring that our relationship, and relationships with others have a long-term perspective and seek to strengthen each partner.



MUTUALLY ACCOUNTABLE

Providing support to each other as equal contributors, not controlling. Holding each other to account for our agreements and actions and feeling comfortable to call each other out in a respectful manner before any grievances or issues transpire. Acknowledging that this relationship is two ways – reporting and accountabilities are equal and both partners accept their responsibilities to the other.



ETHICAL

As contributors operating ethically with each other, and across all areas of our work. This includes holding ourselves and each other to account to adhering to global and regional ethical research standards – building upon and strengthening these standards as appropriate, in support ethical research across the Pacific.



RESPECTFUL

We commit to communicate respectfully about our collaboration only using each other's name and intellectual property with authorisation and informed consent.

³ HAG-PIANGO workshop (PIANGO participant).

THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The approach taken to work together in partnership for both partners was as significant as the research outcomes. HAG and PIANGO jointly managed the entire research process, including conceptualising the research objectives, identifying methods and developing products. Importantly, PIANGO and the NLUs led the research work on the ground. Ensuring co-production during the conceptualisation, data collection, analysis and socialisation phases was the foundation of the research. Through this approach, PIANGO and HAG aim to develop enduring partnerships with Pacific actors, with a focus on supporting the needs and priorities of these partners.

"For HAG, the partnership with PIANGO has fundamentally changed how we engage, partner and invest in our national partners. This is why we believe how we do the research and manage the partnership is as important as the research output."⁴

APPROACH TO ETHICS

Although each partner had existing, independent ethical processes, PIANGO and HAG resolved not to rely on these independently but to strengthen and deepen them by jointly rearticulating these obligations. The research partnership has sought to develop methodologies that reflect Pacific ethical research methods and integrate participatory and localised approaches.

HAG is committed to upholding Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and the Research for Development Impact Network's ethical research principles which are applied across all research projects.⁵ PIANGO uses its own development effectiveness framework, as well as Pacific research frameworks such as approach to indigenous Itaukei research and the talanoa research approach to guide ethical research processes.⁶ HAG and PIANGO are also committed to upholding all required national research ethics processes, such as the approval process with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre for our Vanuatu baseline study (see box 1).

Each individual research methodology articulates ethical considerations, including those that are specific to particular country contexts. PIANGO and HAG discuss respective approaches and agree jointly on parameters and key important aspects such as processes for obtaining consent for conducting research in communities or with key stakeholders. By combining these standards and tailored approaches, PIANGO and HAG commit to ensuring research is appropriate and beneficial to key research stakeholders across the region.

The partnership agreement structuring PIANGO and HAG's work under the Humanitarian Horizons program incorporated a commitment to ethical research. Within the program, each project (such as a particular study) is outlined in a tailored terms of reference (TOR) and contract agreement, as required by the broader partnership agreement. The TOR articulates a commitment to the relevant research ethics processes, specifying those that are unique to the country context. The contracts also establish privacy and confidentiality requirements.

4 HAG-PIANGO workshop.

5 ACFID and RDI, *Principles and guidelines for ethical research and evaluation in development*, 2017. https://rdinetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/G2321_ACFID-RDI_PG2017_WEB_compressed.pdf

6 Timotei M. Vaioleti, 2006, *Talanoa Research Methodology: A developing position on Pacific Research*, *Wakaito Journal of Education*, 12, iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture, Indigenous Itaukei Research, Defining Research Locally.

Box 1: Localising research ethics

Work on the Vanuatu baseline illustrates the primacy of locally grounded ethics in research. The [Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy](#) stipulates the country's national research ethics process. It outlines principles such as respect for *kastom* (indigenous knowledge and practice and its expressions) and community interests.

HAG and PIANGO worked with the Vanuatu Association for Non-Government Organisations (VANGO) to receive ethics approval from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, the executive arm of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council. PIANGO and VANGO's knowledge of ethical processes in the Pacific set the research approach, including how and when to engage stakeholders and acting according to *kastom*. Respecting these principles and processes is the foundation for sustainable, localised research.

As the relationship between the two organisations has matured, engagement on financial management has also become easier.

For example, the funding for this research impact paper has been linked to the output (and broad activities agreed in order to deliver the output), but PIANGO retains the flexibility to internally allocate resources as best suits the organisation, including to support research personnel.

"Once we got the feel that we trust each other, we don't focus on the funding. I never heard anyone question are we getting enough money – who has the bigger portion? We never had those questions ever come up."⁷

This approach has enabled HAG and PIANGO to maintain the focus on delivering quality outputs and strengthening impact while also allowed us to engage constructively beyond formal project objectives.

APPROACH TO FUNDING

In keeping with their agreed principles, HAG and PIANGO have conducted discussions on funding transparently. Both partners wanted to move beyond short-term and ad hoc project work, a shift that can contribute to the localisation of humanitarian research. Funding discussions were underpinned by a commitment to multi-year funding. Budget allocations are linked to co-designed outputs and staff time, rather than itemised tasks or separate budget lines. This is based on the recognition and mutual understanding of each other's expertise and multifaceted contributions to a research project.

Funding breakdown to local and national partners for the localisation stream



\$107,200 Overall funding



to all **local** and **national partners**



under the **Localisation of Humanitarian Action** research stream



as of **July 2020**

⁷ HAG-PIANGO workshop.



UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH IMPACT ACROSS THE PACIFIC

This section explores the impact of the research across the Pacific and the case study countries and how working in partnership has influenced how the research is shared, and what it is used for. It maps out some of the ways in which the research approach has enhanced the relevance of the research, promoted local ownership and encouraged the use of effective and appropriate methods, and ensured the research products could speak to local audiences.

Our research in a snapshot

In 2018 PIANGO led a consultation process with central national and international humanitarian actors in 3 countries to explore Pacific priorities for measuring change. Members of PIANGO's network of umbrella bodies, referred to as National Liaison Units (NLUs), were instrumental in the process. It helped identify 7 priorities for a holistic approach tracking to localisation, captured in the paper [Tracking Progress on Localisation: A Pacific Perspective](#).

Building on this process and incorporating Pacific priorities and contextual factors, PIANGO and HAG developed a [Measuring Localisation Framework](#). This framework articulates how stakeholders can measure progress on localisation at a country level and provided the methodology for PIANGO, the NLUs and HAG to conduct four localisation baselines in [Vanuatu](#), [Tonga](#), [Fiji](#) and the [Solomon Islands](#). The baselines provide an evidence base for national actors to advocate for accountability and change and for international actors to track implementation of localisation commitments. The work has been disseminated across the region by PIANGO and their members, and shared in national, regional and global forums.

While PIANGO and HAG's work aimed to increase local leadership in humanitarian action in the Pacific, there is evidence that it is having an impact further afield.⁸ For further analysis on research impact and influence outside of the region, including in Asia and the global level, see HAG's [Reach and Reality: Tracking the impact of our research](#).

⁸ Veronique Barbelet, John Bryant and Barnaby Willitts-King, '*All eyes are on local actors': Covid-19 and local humanitarian action - Opportunities for systemic change*', HPG Briefing Note, July 2020. The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) used PIANGO and HAG's baseline approach to inform the development of their Localisation Performance Measurement Framework <http://www.near.ngo/home/workdetail?id=21>

At the regional level – influence of the research

PIANGO has taken a leading role in sharing the localisation research and advocating for its use in policymaking across the Pacific. The reporting back mechanism, after each baseline was conducted in-country, was used to promote local leadership in humanitarian response by applying

the data emerging from the research. The baseline findings are easy to understand and have been widely recognised by stakeholder. There have been a number of opportunities for PIANGO to present the findings at national, regional and international platforms.

PIANGO internationally sharing research findings

-  **Red R Brisbane Localisation workshop 2018** – further dissemination of the 7 priority areas identified from the Pacific consultations
-  **Australian Aid Conference 2019** – sharing of the 'Tracking Progress on Localisation' and the Vanuatu Baseline
-  **Pacific Resilience Meeting Pre-Youth Forum 2019** – presentation on the localisation agenda at the pre-Youth forum drawing on the findings from HAG and PIANGO's localisation research
-  **Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Localisation of Aid, Indonesia** – presentation on the findings from the baselines

PIANGO has worked with and supported the NLUs with further advocacy at national and regional fora. For PIANGO, strengthening the research capacity and enhancing the research skills of the NLUs—especially when they are the lead researchers in their country—was an important focus. This helped to create greater ownership of the research process and products. The research process also helped to enhance the recognition of the NLUs as national platforms, whereby some of them have been mandated by their respective governments to coordinate civil society organisations (CSOs) during a disaster. For PIANGO, this has also been a positive outcome as it continues to strengthen PIANGO's NLU network and increase their ability to collectively advocate for positive change.

The partnership with HAG and the increased visibility that the research has generated has helped to open up new opportunities for PIANGO to partner with other humanitarian actors. These new partnerships include working relationships with the START Network and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). The research work has also consolidated PIANGO's role within the Pacific as a resource hub for localisation. This is also highlighted by PIANGO currently functioning as a co-chair of the Localisation Technical Working

Group on under the Pacific Resilience Partnership Taskforce (see box 2).

Box 2: PRP Technical Working Group on Localisation

The [Technical Working Group on Localisation](#) was established under the PRP Taskforce in August 2019 to further articulate what localisation means in and for the region. The agreement to set up the TWG was reached after a Pacific delegation (including PIANGO) attended the Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Localisation of Aid. PIANGO is currently one of 3 co-chairs of the TWG.

In 2020 the TWG has two priorities:

- ▶ mapping and tracking of agencies working on localisation
- ▶ developing a guidance note on localisation specific to the Pacific context.
- ▶ The TWG has adopted the definitions from the *Tracking Progress on Localisation* report and other HAG and PIANGO products to complement their work.

Fiji



The localisation baseline study [Localisation in Fiji: Demonstrating Change](#) was developed together with Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) as the NLU. FCOSS has since used the materials to inform its interventions, which are based on a vision of community resilience (see page 16). For example, the localisation baseline helped FCOSS to produce a more targeted CSO protocol for Fiji. It has also informed its advocacy in policy forums, consultations with international development partners and international NGOs. The findings from the baseline study have allowed FCOSS to bring up evidence-based points in these forums to challenge and shape the discussions.

The significant weight that comes with its mandate from the government, and its active position in the humanitarian infrastructure, have given FCOSS the ability to advocate on localisation to a broader audience. However, there have been instances where FCOSS has had to present on localisation to challenging audiences. In such situations, the baseline data and findings have been useful in showcasing how far the localisation process has progressed in the country over the years, and the significant role played by local organisations in the domestic response processes.

"Often times FCOSS have had to swallow what it really wanted to say and focus on the research and really not get drawn into the politics and mud-slinging, or to be emotional about the conversation but to use the research to support the discussions".⁹

One advantage of the partnership with HAG and PIANGO was that it did not place undue demands on FCOSS' attention and facilitation. While PIANGO and HAG developed the framework, it was general enough for FCOSS to use it at national and sub-national level. FCOSS organised a workshop in March 2020 with the participation of NGOs, CSOs and government counterparts, using the research to highlight the importance of localisation and advocate for greater local leadership in the response to COVID-19. The Fijian Government has since continued to acknowledge the greater role played by local actors in managing activities on the ground.

However, FCOSS found that regular reminders and advocacy were required to ensure that insights from framework are appropriately integrated when implementing work. The localisation research is not only shared at policy level but also at the community level – specifically to the District Council of Social Services (DCOSS). Since this research is widely used in Fiji's local communities, translating the localisation research into vernacular would assist in its implementation at the community level.

⁹ FCOSS representative



Working towards a community resilience approach

FCOSS promotes policies and interventions based on the understanding that communities already know how to respond to disasters and that every Pacific Islander knows the role they have to play within the community in a time of disaster. These structures were put in place based on lived experiences.

"The ideal Pacific is where the community in the Pacific who have lived with disasters have coped, and everything that is being re-learned now about the way they lived is telling us that the community and Pacific preparedness and disaster readiness is a key part of their lifestyles and the customs which we are just re-learning now."¹⁰

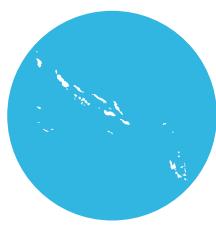
FCOSS would like to see a Pacific where the communities are not waiting on the government or international NGOs to come and help but are able to immediately activate their own plans as soon as news of impending disasters is received. FCOSS would like a revival of the traditional approach where the communities were less reliant on external support.

Any partnership that looks at resilience must build on these existing structures; at the same time, if FCOSS wants to present new ideas to communities, government or donors, FCOSS must do this based on research. This is why the partnership with HAG, PIANGO and FCOSS is important – especially in the current changing global context and in light of COVID-19.

Traditional houses of Navala village, Viti Levu island, Fiji.
Don Mammoser / Shutterstock.

¹⁰ FCOSS representative.

SOLOMON ISLANDS



As the NLU for Solomon Islands, Development Services Exchange (DSE) worked with HAG and PIANGO on the baseline study [Localisation in the Solomon Islands: Demonstrating Change](#)

and continues to advocate for change based on these findings. The research complements DSE's partnership with PIANGO and recognises the potential capabilities in engaging in their development aspiration.

DSE has introduced the research to the Solomon Islands Government, including to the Ministry of Home Affairs and government task force committee working on an NGO policy. It has been regularly advocating to the government through ongoing partnerships in activities around the State of Emergency (SOE) declared in relation to COVID-19. In terms of significant changes in the area of policy, the government is working on a legal framework that will identify how civil society organisations can engage. DSE is using findings from the localisation assessment to input into this process, aiming to influence moves from *ad hoc* cooperation to more sustained relationships and assistance.

DSE has also engaged with CSOs on the localisation baseline research. The baseline and the ongoing work by DSE has generated interest and excitement from CSOs in the Solomon Islands as they believe it is time for national organisations to take ownership in humanitarian operations and decision-making. Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold and COVID-19 responses have further highlighted gaps in coordination, as international NGOs did not communicate with local CSOs when they participated in the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) meeting and National Emergency Response Team (NERT). Over the years international organisation representatives composed a majority of the DSE board, but this has completely changed in recent years.

"In our recent AGM, we did not vote for any international CSOs to be part of the board. This will help us talk and discuss on issues that matter to us and are about us. Having no INGOs on the governance of DSE will give space for local actors or local CSOs and see if the absence of INGOs will give local NGOs the opportunity to run their organisation and not depend too much on INGOs. This is encouraging self reliance at the governance of local NGOs though at times we will need advice from INGOs."¹¹

The research is yet to be presented to local government (at the time of publication), however DSE have started introducing the concept with them. Once the SOE is lifted, the report will be presented to local government, and DSE is hoping to receive further feedback and increase engagement. Many have already expressed their interest during the initial meetings.

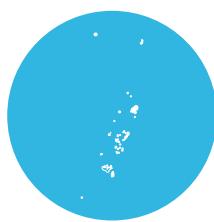
"One of the biggest challenges in reaching the provincial centre is finance. Getting the audience to be part of this discussion is also another challenge especially with the INGOs who are always reluctant to provide us with information"¹²

As with other projects, PIANGO's NLUs are the gatekeepers to any research work and dissemination. Commitments from NLUs are important to activities such as getting approval from the relevant authority on time and visiting provincial centres and community-based organisations. The timely distribution of the research to all sectors is paramount. At every stage decision-making must be people-centred and sustainable.

¹¹ DSE representative.

¹² DSE representative.

TONGA



Localisation has been a part of ongoing discussion by Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT) in meetings with local governments, national government, CSOs and communities. The process of conceptualising and implementing localisation is ongoing in how the CSFT approaches humanitarian activities and sessions with HAG and PIANGO helped explore the research and lessons from other partners in the Pacific.

The localisation baseline report, [Localisation in Tonga: Demonstrating Change](#), has been very useful for CSOs in Tonga. It has pushed CSFT and its members to look at its own partnerships—which has led to the setting up of a Humanitarian Committee to guide how CSFT responds and how it can work together as a sector. It also encouraged coordination amongst the CSOs, with signs of CSOs beginning to complement each other through their coordination.

However, it has been a challenge to ensure that everyone walks through the steps of localisation and builds relevant actions into the work so that the outcomes will fall into place. CSFT's response in the last few tropical cyclones have been marred by slow assessment from the communities and multiple, competing assessment processes. CSFT called a national dialogue with government, local government, CSOs and communities to look at the initial assessment. This process developed a consolidated form, which would be used by CSFT to train local government to generate data soon after a cyclone impact. Unfortunately, with TC Harold, one of the organisations offered to do the assessment using their own form and covering their own costs. This resulted in a product prepared through collective agreement not being used.

As a result, CSFT have had to go back to ground zero and recommence work and reengage in

the CSO Humanitarian Committee to see how to move forward the concept of localisation through collective agreement, not just as a single organisation.

"This exercise taught us that we should not preach the gospel, as much as we need to implement. We have had three cyclones after the research, so we had ample opportunities to practice implementing localisation. There are lots of interests in localisation, but we are slow to see how we can strengthen local communities to take on the work. I think the question is how do we influence the cluster systems to allow the participation of affected communities?"¹³

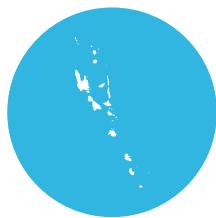
Resources play an important role. CSFT does not have a dedicated person to lead localisation initiatives. There is no core funding for CSOs which means due to competing priorities, CSO complete piecemeal work in order to survive rather than conceive or implement long-term interventions.

"In CSFT our staff are very small and overtasked that we don't have anyone to continue to initiate and push localisation. This is why we have built the partnership among our sector to share the load and time to push localisation. Localisation should be owned by everyone, to believe in it, and to practice the concept."¹⁴

¹³ Tongan civil society representative

¹⁴ Tongan civil society representative

VANUATU



There has been an increased focus on promoting local leadership in humanitarian response in Vanuatu and the localisation baseline report, [Localisation in Vanuatu: Demonstrating change](#), jointly produced by PIANGO, VANGO and HAG, has contributed to this process. Lessons from previous responses have also continued to highlight the need for greater localisation in order to better manage future responses. Some of these actions have already been implemented such as the decentralisation of the disaster response structures.¹⁵ More devolved decision-making powers have been useful for the provincial directors as they managed the response on the ground—as during TC Harold.¹⁶

CSOs have been able to use the localisation baseline to advocate for greater local leadership in the humanitarian response space in Vanuatu. This has been through directly advocating with the government, sharing the findings with international and national actors, and promoting the concept with donors.

"We need to take ownership of the report and we must encourage the spirit of localisation in all levels of development from national down to the grass roots."¹⁷

The localisation baseline work and the resulting consultations created an added impetus to the government's work on locally led and owned humanitarian response including the development of the Vanuatu NGO policy.¹⁸ As VANGO works closely with the government and NDMO, and carries a government mandate, it has been easier for VANGO members to share the findings from

the research and use it to advocate for greater localisation focus.

From this perspective, COVID-19 presented an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of locally led response. In the immediate aftermath of TC Harold impacting Vanuatu during the COVID-19 pandemic, VANGO used the baseline report to advocate that the response had to be "transformative, value based and locally led".¹⁹ The NDMO's decision to limit arrival of international specialists during the response to TC Harold indicated the government's commitment to draw more heavily on local leadership during response efforts.²⁰

Making a [summary of the report available in Bislama](#) was also important in increasing uptake of the findings. This has enabled VANGO especially to share the report more widely with their member organisations, especially those that are based outside of the main cities and which consume more information in their native language.

"We did the report together and it went as far as the translation of the report because the majority of the people understands it."²¹

Many challenges remain in increasing localised responses, ranging from gaps in coordination to lack of sufficient funding.²² But there is also increased recognition of many of these challenges and the approaches needed to address them, which is a positive indication of progress.²³

"Activities that are promoting localisation needs to be financially supported for it to work effectively."²⁴

15 Interview 4.

16 Vanuatu Association of NGOs and Humanitarian Advisory Group, *No Turning Back: Local leadership in Vanuatu's response to Tropical Cyclone Harold*, 2020, https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/TC-Harold-Practice-Paper_final-electronic.pdf

17 Interview 5.

18 Interviews 4, 5.

19 "VANGO: Ensure mobilization of humanitarian assistance and help build local capabilities," *Daily Post*, 16 April 2020, https://dailypost.vu/news/vango-ensure-mobilization-of-humanitarian-assistance-and-help-build-local-capabilities_article_886a3d42-7f63-11ea-b541-2bd7deb1ad46.html

20 NDMO Update, Facebook, 8 April 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/605044193217937/posts/1312412105814472/?d=n>

21 Interview 6.

22 Interview 3, 5.

23 Interview 6.

24 Interview 5.

ENABLERS AND CHALLENGES

As the case studies above demonstrate, research approaches and impacts differ across contexts and countries. Below we draw out some key lessons for the research partnership and for research impact.

ENABLERS



For the partnership



Trust

Establishing a trust-based relationship between HAG and PIANGO created a culture of open discussion of challenges and issues, and work to identify solutions. The partnership also reduced in formality as it evolved. This fostered an informal culture based on trust and friendship.

"In the Pacific there is a trusting culture. Once the trust is in place, and reinforced by the evidence of how the partnership practices were delivering work, it has accelerated the cooperation."²⁵



Communication

PIANGO took the lead in coordinating with the NLUs and local partners. This was important to ensure a continued relationship and to address any issues that emerged. For example, at the time of the localisation research in Tonga, HAG was working on additional research projects in the country which caused some confusion among the CSFT and other local organisations. In this instance, PIANGO worked with the local partners to provide clarity and was able to advise HAG on what to do moving forward.

"HAG had not previously worked in a long-term program where we were working with a range of partners. In addition to building the partnerships, it also involved building the system. Working with PIANGO has helped HAG to also define how we work with national partner."²⁶



Reflection

The project became a learning experience for all partners involved, not only from a localisation assessment point of view but also from a partnership perspective. For HAG, PIANGO and NLUs, the experience will inform future collaborations through self-awareness and understanding of others' perspectives.

²⁵ HAG – PIANGO workshop.

²⁶ HAG – PIANGO workshop.



For research impact



Complementarity

NLUs were critical in ensuring the research would be widely shared. The government mandates of NLUs supported their validity and reach when sharing findings and influencing ongoing discussions and policy planning. PIANGO's mandate as the peak regional entity also allowed it to work closely with the NLUs when engaging respective governments together. PIANGO was, and continues to be, a central point that enabled HAG to develop and maintain complementary partnerships with the civil society in the Pacific.



Continuity

PIANGO provides ongoing support and follow-up to NLUs in sharing the findings as well as advocating for greater use of research findings. In partnership with HAG, PIANGO also coordinated the research activities together with the NLUs, often taking on the lead role on this work, which helped to offset the workload for the NLUs.

CHALLENGES



For the partnership



Planning and expectations

Even the best-laid plans can face tests or run into unexpected difficulties. Research and the many activities that support it are time-intensive and subject to external pressures. Beyond their collaboration, the two organisations have different roles and priorities—which means they bring distinctive strengths to the partnership, but at times must also manage those various priorities.



For research impact



Instrumentalisation

A significant challenge in sharing and in the uptake of the research is on how different stakeholders choose to interpret or apply the findings. There is an inherent risk that the localisation agenda can become a political tool for different partners and can lead to polarisation between national and international actors in responding to the needs of affected people in time. Addressing this

issue requires local NGOs to take a constructive approach, which PIANGO has been advocating through the NLU network.

"This partnership will bring improvement once all Pacific people work harmoniously with the principles based on the research."²⁷



Accessibility

Translation into vernacular languages is important to increase uptake of the research at a local level. The research reports were published in English, and only the summary of the Vanuatu report was translated to vernacular. As NLUs increasingly look to encourage local organisations and communities to engage in the localisation discussion, not having readily available vernacular resources can make this process more challenging. Having findings in a local language makes it easier for local communities especially, to be able to more clearly understand, articulate and adapt these principles in policy platforms.



Resourcing

Local coordination bodies and NLUs do not often have dedicated resources to champion the localisation work, and their resource-stretched organisations find it difficult to devote work to the topic on an ongoing basis.



Centralisation

Relationship dynamics of internationally based organisations (primarily in Australia) influence country-based and Pacific-focused localisation discussions. While many international organisations have been supportive of the process and often actively engaged in the discussions led by local organisations, some international organisations have shown resistance to integrating findings and recommendations from the baseline studies.

"Fiji and the Pacific are part of a global community of CSOs with specific standards—one of which is about complementarity. One of the things that FCOSS found discouraging is that while FCOSS tries to move forward on some of these global conversations around localisation, the Australian NGOs just engage in their own conversations."²⁸

27 DSE representative.

28 FCOSS representative.

LOOKING FORWARD

The response to COVID-19 is one of the most significant opportunities to influence change based on the research. With travel restrictions and repatriation of international staff, local organisations in the Pacific played a much greater and more visible role in COVID-19 responses – especially around community engagement and risk mitigation.

As global attention on localisation intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, opportunities arose for HAG and PIANGO to contribute research findings from the baselines to the global discussion. The [Five ways to support locally led disaster response in the Pacific during COVID-19](#) think piece released by HAG and PIANGO captured lessons emerging out of the localisation baselines. Further, PIANGO has been able to share insights and progress on the learning from this process in knowledge sharing sessions such as [COVID-19 and Localisation: Shifting the power, or shifting the risk?](#). The existing partnership also enabled a responsive analysis by PIANGO and HAG after TC Harold struck Vanuatu which drew on the approaches in the Measuring Localisation Framework.

Supporting ongoing localisation mapping in Pacific

The COVID-19 pandemic will have a major and potentially long-term impact on how humanitarian and development agencies work in the Pacific region. The PRP TWG on Localisation initiated a process to conduct a mapping of locally led response across the Pacific by its members and other stakeholders. As the co-chairs of the TWG, PIANGO with femLink Pacific and Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation are leading on this mapping process.

As part of the ongoing partnership on localisation, HAG is working with PIANGO to support the PRP

TWG on Localisation for this exercise aimed at mapping locally led responses to COVID-19 and other disasters across the Pacific.

While the TWG on Localisation leads the process, HAG has provided support through PIANGO where needed. However, clear clauses were put in place in the TOR for this support, that the data ownership remained with the TWG. PIANGO was able to obtain consent from the TWG for HAG to use and share this data with the Australian Red Cross and La Trobe University for ongoing, broader COVID-19 and localisation mapping research.

Assessing the impact of COVID on localisation and the humanitarian sector in the Pacific

As part of the ongoing localisation research partnership between PIANGO and HAG under the Humanitarian Horizons, further joint research is proposed to be undertaken to provide a comparison of how the localisation context has changed due to COVID and to draw conclusions about progress by linking back to the baseline data.



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Both PIANGO and HAG believe working in partnership on localisation research enhances uptake and use of it, and strengthens the ability to influence change. Both partners plan to replicate, and build on this way of working in the future, and to further evidence gaps through practitioner-oriented research.

PIANGO is utilising the learning from the partnership with HAG to inform its organisational approach to their members or National Liaison Units (NLUs). PIANGO has now replicated the partnership approach with their members or NLUs who are now taking the lead in the implementation of activities on the ground. This is testament of PIANGO's commitment to the localisation agenda.

HAG will continue to use the learning from the partnership to hold itself to the highest standard of working with local partners, valuing relationships, and continuing to have open conversations about where the approach could be strengthened. HAG continues to use this learning, and the research itself to inform the broader organisational approach. This will be leveraged in the future in the next Humanitarian Horizons research program, and in setting organisational objectives for supporting localisation more broadly.

Tanna Island, Vanuatu.
Kersom Richard, Ni-Van Photography.

