

Regional Perspectives Project – Data Collection Plan

Introduction

The Regional Perspectives Project is led by the University of Adelaide (UoA) with funding from the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG). The project seeks to gain a greater understanding of perspectives from the Pacific Islands region on key issues related to security and stability, broadly defined, and framed within a Pacific context. By so doing, the research will help Defence better understand the region, develop more sustainable and culturally sensitive engagement strategies, and play its part in creating a safer, fairer, more stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

The project will seek to foster Pacific agency, including the framing of key topics/issues within Pacific experiences and perspectives. Reflecting this, the UoA has (and will further) develop collaborative relationships with Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Australian research partners for the in-country aspects of the project.

Reflecting the intent of the project, data collection will be primarily conducted by Vanuatu and Solomon Islands citizens, and data collection methods will be codesigned by the UoA team and our Pacific research partners, Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange in Solomon Islands, and Linda Kenni and her team, in Vanuatu. James Cox from Peacifica and Tess Newton Cain will support and facilitate the work of our Pacific research partners.

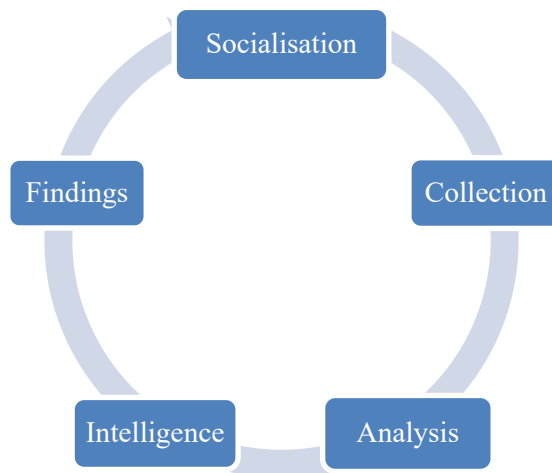
Research methodology

This project will primarily use qualitative research methods to gain in-depth understanding of how people in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu understand security and stability, as well as the resilience of their state institutions and other community structures to potentially coercive influences.

This project will be underpinned by a grounded theory perspective, that is, it will set out to discover or construct theory from data, systematically obtained and analysed using comparative analysis. This means that the research themes and analytical concepts will emerge from the research data, rather than being pre-determined by the research team. This approach will allow us to obtain data from purposefully selected groups with particular insights or a breadth of experiences, rather than from statistically representative samples of the population. It will emphasise consulting representatives from seven broadly defined participant groups: youth (18-21 years old), women, men, civil society (including church and community groups), politicians and public servants (from provincial and central governments), experts, and private sector representatives. Recognising that views may differ across the two states, efforts will be made to ensure that participants come from across the two countries' capital cities, regional centres, and rural areas.

In recognition of the complexity of Melanesia societies and the objectives of the project where co-creation is a core value, the methodological approach employed by the researchers will respect context and ensure co-creation across all research interactions. This is also to avoid common criticisms of some researchers deploying 'power over' rather than 'power with' participants, the project will co-create and co-own knowledge (Burnard 2004).

Leaning on the Melanesian dialogical engagement principle of tok stori (Sanga and Reynolds 2021) as the main research tool, our research methodology framework as demonstrated below will be:



- **Socialisation:** To legitimise the project in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, transparency is crucial. Our Pacific research partners will lead media forums and community and public consultations to orientate the project with both the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu communities in advance of data collection. This will also be a useful opportunity to build trust in the project and to test our assumptions. Given the wide span of the research and sensitivities associated with researching security issues, it is envisaged that socialisation activities will be undertaken in advance of the data collection and then again at the completion of the project.
- **Collection:** Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are both collective societies and not individualistic cultures. As such, collectivist foundations inform practice including how knowledge is produced or co-produced (Zurba, et al. 2022). In 'doing no harm', cultural approaches that utilise collective forums such as focus groups require a nuanced understanding of Melanesian worldviews. As well as partnering with Pacific researchers, care will be taken regarding the power dynamics within communities and groups to enable people to 'talem stori blong em' (engage in interactive story telling). 'Co-interview' techniques may be utilised to dilute power dynamics between the researcher and participants and to avoid 'information capture' with the use of only one researcher. Co-interviewing has been described as a technique to bridge cultural and gender divides (Burnard 2004). Co-interviewing by two or more people may be appropriate at times to desensitise discussions and respect cultural norms. The project embraces the transfer of skills and the sharing of knowledge, therefore, having collective involvement in data collection is mutually beneficial for both participants and the project. This also mitigates concerns about colonial approaches to research. Partnerships with Pacific educational institutions and a range of Pacific researchers will be supported to demonstrate goodwill and shared values.

In addition, in this pandemic environment, the use of multiple interviewers may be necessary in case lead researchers fall ill. In some cases, it may be necessary for cultural considerations to change researchers (it may not be culturally appropriate for female to tok tok wetem (talk with) male and vice versa. In addition, there may be a different process with 'interviewing' custodians of community knowledge (usually the elders, chiefs or people with status)).

Pacific research partners will be encouraged to document their experiences and observations as Banyan Daily Notes. The shade and protection of the banyan tree are commonly used as meeting places in Melanesian countries. The use of the banyan tree as a metaphor to capture stories is considered fitting.

Filming and documentary techniques, as well as audio recordings, may be undertaken on a case-by-case basis in some locations. Care will be taken to ensure the use of these methods comply with both UoA ethical standards and Pacific cultures.

- **Analysis:** to make sense of the data and information collected, the project team will engage in analytical workshops. In view of the objectives of the project, and in recognition of Melanesia constructs of time and space, past and future focused analytical workshops will be conducted to map out information that will answer the research questions.



- Intelligence: information useful for decision makers as a result of robust analysis will be collated as the key findings of the project.
- Findings: responses to the research questions will be outlined as the key findings of the research. Information will be made public in accordance with the project Communication Plan.

The research will include focus groups. Focus groups allow for a variety of paradigms, worldviews, and perspectives to be discussed concurrently. They also provide space for research participants to play an active role in shaping the form and content of research discussions. These focus groups will be organised by our Pacific research partners, who will also facilitate the discussion. This will ensure that the focus groups are set-up and conducted according to cultural protocols. Although the focus groups will be structured around key research questions, the format will allow for facilitators and participants to interpret these questions in the context of the discussions and to add new topics for consideration. This means that the data collected will provide both a snapshot of the specific concerns and considerations of each group, but also a broad overview of peoples' experiences and expectations.

Key informant interviews will be another research method. These interviews will allow us to gain insights from experts from government (both provincial and central), civil society, the private sector, and other community groups. Identification of these key informants will be led by our Pacific research partners, who will also set-up and conduct the bulk of these interviews, unless they advise us that it is more appropriate that one of the Australia-based researchers conduct the interview, or the interview subject requests that their interview be conducted by one of the Australia-based researchers. We recognise that data collected from in-depth interviews is not generalizable to the population at large, but we see value in gaining the insights and opinions of prominent people working on the frontline of political decision-making, diplomacy, business, lobbying, and development. In-depth interviews will also add depth to the research data by adding specificity and detail from a range of vantage points.

Burnard P. (2004) 'Some problems in using ethnographic methods in nursing research: commentary and examples from a Thai nursing study', *Divers Health Soc Care* 1 (1): 45-51.

Sanga K. and Reynolds M. (2021) 'Bringing research back home: exploring Indigenous Melanesian tok stori as ontology', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 17(4):532-542. doi:[10.1177/11771801211058342](https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211058342)
<https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.12838157.v1>

Zurba, M., et al. (2022) 'Learning from knowledge co-production research and practice in the twenty-first century: global lessons and what they mean for collaborative research in Nanatsiavut', *Sustainability Science* 17: 449-467.

Selection and recruitment of participants

Participants will be selected with a view to gaining a cross section of the views, understandings, and perspectives of the populations of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. As described, this means that participants will come from the private sector, civil society, civil service, politicians and public servants (from provincial and central governments), youth, students, churches, and other community groups. Efforts will be made to include women and other under-represented groups in the participant pool. Efforts will also be made to ensure that participants come from across both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, to ensure that a range of different geographical perspectives are included. This recognises that different parts of each country are likely to have different priorities, perspectives, and interests.

Participants will be identified and recruited primarily by the research partners in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu based on their knowledge of their communities, and their existing relationships and contacts. Participants may also be recruited via advertisement, particularly for the focus group data collection.

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Initial contact with research participants will primarily be made by our Pacific research partners, given that they will conduct most interviews and focus groups. Our Pacific research partners have longstanding established relationships in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, combined with the necessary language skills and cultural understanding.

All participants will be provided with the Participant Information Sheet, translated as required. Participants in the in-depth interviews will be provided with a written Consent Form and their written consent will be sought prior to the interview commencing. Participants in focus

groups will be requested to provide verbal consent, as is most practical in a more informal group context. Our Pacific research partners will conduct the focus groups and will take written records and – of the participants agree – audio recordings of that consent.

When participants are not fluent in English, their interview or focus group will be conducted in an appropriate language by our Pacific research partners. As described, our Participant Information Sheet will be translated to ensure its intelligibility by all research participants. If participants are unable to read that sheet, it will be explained to them verbally by the Pacific research partner conducting their interview or focus group.

Managing risks to participants and researchers

Approval for this research will be sought from the University of Adelaide (UoA) Human Research Ethics Committee.

Involvement of Australia-based UoA research team

While data collection in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu will primarily be led by our Pacific research partners, Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Linda Kenni and her team, the following project researchers based in Australia may travel to Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to observe and participate in some of the interviews, focus groups, and other research activities. They may also undertake a limited number of interviews, such as with elites, when our Pacific partners advise that this is the most appropriate way to gather data:

- Prof Joanne Wallis, UoA project lead;
- Ms Maima Koro, Pacific Research Fellow;
- Derek Futaiasi, Pacific Research Fellow (from November 2022);
- Mr James Cox, research consultant; and
- Priestley Habru, Pacific PhD Scholar; and
- William Waqavakatoga, Pacific PhD Scholar.

Storage

All data collected in all forms (paper based, audio, digital, visual etc) will be securely stored and managed in country by the respective Pacific research partners and with the UoA and the DSTG teams. The UoA Human Research Ethics Committee application for approval and Communication Plan outline accessibility and usage of the data.

Currency

This is a living document and will be revised during implementation of the project to ensure it remains relevant and is fit-for-purpose.

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Further enquiries

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