

PACIFIC RESEARCH AND POLICY CENTRE

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Entrepreneurial assistance in the Pacific – Policy Brief N°5 mentoring for development

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Donor countries, such as New Zealand, are increasingly supporting business mentoring in developing countries. Recent research by Massey University's Gisela Purcell explored the value of donor-funded mentoring by examining the Pacific Business Mentoring Programme (PBMP) in Samoa.

Business mentoring in the Pacific

Indigenous entrepreneurs play a key role in the economic development of Pacific Island countries, but can face challenges balancing their business needs with local cultural norms and expectations. Donor-funded business mentoring can create positive development outcomes, however mentors need to have a good understanding of local contexts, otherwise their advice may conflict with local cultural practices. Gisela Purcell's research found that only 17% of entrepreneurs she interviewed in Samoa felt that their NZ mentors understood the cultural context. This lack of understanding was problematic as many cultural practices add to the resilience of local people, and therefore should not be undermined.

Rationale for research

Economic development in the Pacific is a key strategic focus for the New Zealand Aid Programme. The PBMP, established 2010 and funded by the New Zealand Aid Programme, aims to support local entrepreneurs and build sustainable economic development in Pacific Island countries. It is important to explore how society and culture influence and impact on business, and whether donor-funded mentoring is an effective tool for development assistance in Pacific Island countries.

Recommendations to improve the programme

It is recommended that the PBMP be evaluated from a broad understanding of the central role local cultural and social context plays in the mentoring process. This includes ensuring mentors are aware of the challenges as well as abilities of local entrepreneurs and adapt their advice accordingly; provide interpreters if requested by mentees; encourage business networking amongst local entrepreneurs; create a clear hand-over process when clients change mentors; and reduce the number of clients mentors work with to ensure more in-depth support.

"With increased cultural understanding, mentors can assist indigenous entrepreneurs to ... successfully combine local cultural values with modern business principles. It is only when this balance is attained that a business will be sustainable and able to contribute to the long term development of the local community." (Gisela Purcell)

For more information go to the [PRPC website](#) or contact [Litea Meo-Sewabu](#).

Key Points:

- Donor-funded business mentoring can be an effective tool for development
- Mentors must have a good understanding of the local cultural context and adapt their advice accordingly
- With training and support, mentoring can assist indigenous entrepreneurs to improve their business skills while retaining their cultural identity