

INDIA - COOK ISLANDS BILATERAL BRIEF

India and the Cook Islands established diplomatic relations in 1998. Formerly, High Commissioner at Suva was concurrently accredited to the Cook Islands. However, in 2021, concurrent accreditation of the Cook Islands was transferred to the High Commissioner at Wellington.

2. The Cook Islands is a prominent member of the Pacific Islands Forum, a regional organization dedicated to promoting cooperation and addressing issues of common concern among Pacific Island nations. India has a special status as an official dialogue partner within this forum, signifying its interest in engaging with the Pacific Island countries. Bilateral relations between the Cook Islands and India have witnessed a significant upswing in recent years. This positive trajectory can be attributed in large part to the establishment of the "Forum for India–Pacific Islands Cooperation."

3. **Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation Summit (FIPIC-III):** The Cook Islands delegation, led by the Prime Minister Mark Brown, attended the FIPIC-III Summit in Port Moresby (PNG) on 22 May 2023. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and PM of PNG James Marape, co-hosted the Summit which was attended by leaders of the 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

4. **The Forum for India-Pacific Island Countries Summit (FIPIC-II):** Mr Nandi Glassie, Minister of Health, Justice and Parliamentary services led the 5-member delegation for the FIPIC-II, Jaipur in August 2015.

5. **The Forum for India-Pacific Island Countries Summit (FIPIC-I):** Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi hosted the First Summit of Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC-I) in Suva (Fiji) during the visit on 19 November 2014 with the participation of 14 Pacific countries. Cook Islands delegation, led by the Prime Minister Henry Puna, attended the Summit.

6. **India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference (IPI-SDC):** Under the umbrella of FIPIC, Government of India organized the India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference (IPI-SDC) which was held at Suva, Fiji on 25-26 May 2017. Minister of State for External Affairs Gen. (Dr.) V.K.Singh (Retd.) hosted the event. The Conference saw the participation of several high profile leaders from the 14 Pacific Island Nations. India signed MoUs for setting up of Centers of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) with Fiji, Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Niue. Prasar Bharati of India also gifted programmatic content on India for telecast to all the Pacific Island Countries. Mr. Mark Brown, Minister of Finance, Cook Islands led the delegation for (IPI-SDC).

Visits and Exchanges

7. MOS(EA) Shri E. Ahamed led the Indian delegation to the 24th Post Forum Dialogue Partners Meeting held in the Cook Islands on 31 August 2012. MOS (EA) interacted with other leaders of delegations and participants of the meeting. He met with the Health Minister of the Cook Islands and reiterated our interest in developing closer relations with the Cook Islands and the Pacific region.

8. Mark Brown, Minister for Finance, visited India on 2-4 February 2013 for the ADB Asia Leadership Program on Sustainable Development and Climate Change held in Delhi.

9. High Commissioner attended the Third Round Table Meeting of Development Partners in Rarotonga on 12 February 2013.

10. John Henry, Associate Minister, Ministry of Internal Affairs visited India in connection with the Second High Level Meeting (HLM) on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights in Asia and the Pacific, held in New Delhi on 23-25 October, 2013.

11. Development Partners Meeting (DPM) was held on 10-14 February 2014 in the Cook Islands (CI), as a forum “for dialogue between government, civil society, private sector, and international development partners on aid effectiveness.” High Commission of India, Suva participated in the meeting.

GOI Assistance

12. Current Projects:

There are six ongoing Community Development Projects in the Cook islands. GoI has granted NZ\$ 5,69,705.05 (US\$ 4,03,000/- approx) for these projects – (i) Road safety improvements for Arorangi School, Tereora College, Takitumu School and Muri market area; (ii) Procurement and installation of waste management system, underground water tank and solar panels; (iii) Procurement of sailing boats and implementation of school sailing development programme; (iv) Procurement of materials to upgrade the Takuvaine Village water station; (v) Renovation of the Tutakimoa Community Centre; (vi) Procurement of machinery for the upkeep of the Rarotonga Bowling Green. Out of these projects, work on two projects have already started. An amount of NZ\$ 227,882/- (US\$ 1,61,180/- approx) as the 1st instalment has been released to the Government of the Cook Islands.

13. Past Projects:

(i) GOI had offered financial assistance worth approx. US\$50,000 to the Government of the Cook Islands in 2005 for executing small projects. GOI offered a grant aid of US\$100,000 each annually to all small Pacific States at the Post Forum Dialogue Partners meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum in Nadi (Fiji) in October 2006 for programmes and for sustainable development, which was increased to US\$ 125,000 in 2009. During PM’s visit to Fiji for The Forum for India-Pacific Island Countries Summit - (FIPIC-I) in November 2014, the Annual Grant-in-Aid for the 14 PIC countries was raised to US\$200,000, with the facility that this would be rolled over annually.

(ii) 2006-07: Financial Assistance given for purchase of computer/software etc. for US\$94,348/-.

(iii) 2010-2011:

a) Financial Assistance given for purchase of computer, photocopier, printer, scanner for St. Joseph Primary School for US\$9880/-.

b) One 4-stroke outboard motor for Avatiu, Tuatonga Fishing Club for US\$12,500/-

c) Repairs of Community building village clinics etc. for US\$12,574/-

d) Construction of new toilet, shower for the Nikao Social Centre for US\$12,500/-

e) Renovation of Ruaau Meeting House Building for US\$12,500/-

(iv) 2012-2013:

- a) A specialized vehicle for disabled persons had been procured by Cook Islands against the GOI Grant-in-Aid in August 2012 – US\$64,597/-.
- b) GOI provided funds in February 2013 for 16 community development projects in February 2014 – US\$385,244/-.
- c) Given financial aid for purchase of equipment for Cricket Tournament – US\$11,452/-

(v) 2013-2014: Grant-in-Aid for 10 Project Proposals – US\$124,332

(vi) 2016-2017: High Commissioner visited Cook Islands on 2 March 2017 to hand over grant of US\$6,90,846/- to Mr Mark Brown, Minister of Finance, for funding of 16 Community Development projects. High Commissioner had meetings with Cook Islands Prime Minister Mr. Henry Puna and Ms. Tapaeru Herrmann, Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Immigration to discuss bilateral matters. High Commissioner also visited Takuvaine Town Child Welfare Clinic, Pokoinu Neighbourhood Watch, and Centre for disabled people. High Commissioner had meetings with Representatives of local 'Chamber of Commerce', and 'Business, Trade & Investment Board'.

Human Resource Development

14. Three slots were utilized out of five offered in 2017-18. Five slots were offered in 2018-19 but no slots were utilized. Both the two slots were unutilized in 2019-20 and also in 2020-21.

15. One diplomat Ms. Maya Edith Kofoed Solomon attended the 70th Professional Course for Foreign Diplomat from 13-31 March 2023 at Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, New Delhi. Two officials attended the training for diplomats of Pacific Island countries organised by the Foreign Service Institute in Nadi, Fiji in May, 2015.

16. Ms Punanga Kaveao, Foreign Service Officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in the 62nd Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD) held at Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi from 27 July to 26 August 2016.

17. **Mahatma Gandhi-Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (MG-CEIT)** funded by GoI was set up by C-DAC at University of South Pacific (USP) in Rarotonga at a cost of Rs. 2.28 Cr. It became operational in May 2019 with the deployment of two IT professionals from C-DAC. Two Master trainer from the Cook Islands were given online training for six months at CDAC ACTS in India on e-Diploma in Advanced Computing (e-DAC). The Project was completed successfully and MG-CEIT formally handed over to the University of South Pacific on 11th May 2021.

18. **Solar Electrification Project:** The GOI's US\$1.5 million flagship project of 'solar electrification of 2800 houses in 14 PICs' kick-started on 15 August 2016 with a one-month refresher training of 43 Solar Mamas from seven PICs at the Centre for Advanced Training and Development (CATD), Nadave, Tailevu, Fiji. 200 houses in Cook Islands have been slated to be solar electrified under this project.

19. **Cooperation at International Forums:** Recently Cook Islands supported following Indian candidatures at international forums:

- i. Indian Candidature to the Executive Board of UNESCO in November 2017 (reciprocal support offered).
- ii. Indian Candidature to International Maritime Organization (IMO) in November 2017.

20. **Culture:** Under ‘Namaste Pacifika’, a Festival of India, Ministry of Culture - sponsored Dr. Yashoda Thakore Kuchipudi dance group, which mesmerized a 600-strong audience in Raratonga on 15 January 2018.

21. **IDY:** On the occasion of the 9th International Day of Yoga 2023 “Sukha Yoga Raratonga” The High Commission organized an inspiring session of Yoga at the National Auditorium, Dome in Raratonga, the Capital of the Cook Islands on 25 June 2023 in which a large number of people participated and learnt about the benefits of yoga.

October 2023