

SUMMARY POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL STRATEGY

Country:	Cook Islands	Project Title:	Improving Internet Connectivity for the South Pacific
Lending/Financing Modality:	Project Loan	Department / Division:	Pacific Department Urban, Social Development and Public Management Division

I. POVERTY AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

Poverty targeting: general intervention

A. Links to the National Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth Strategy and Country Partnership Strategy

The proposed project is aligned with the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan, 2016–2020, which aims to improve information and communication technology (under goal 5) to improve people’s standard of living.^a It is consistent with ADB’s Pacific Approach, 2016–2020, which identifies ICT as an enabler to enhance regional connectivity, competitiveness, and opportunities for socioeconomic development.^b The 2015 Cook Islands National Infrastructure Investment Plan has prioritized ICT infrastructure as key to stimulating national economic growth.^c

B. Results from the Poverty and Social Analysis during Project Preparatory Technical Assistance or Due Diligence

1. Key poverty and social issues. The Cook Islands’ population of 19,000 is dispersed across 15 small islands spread over 1.8 million square kilometers of the South Pacific Ocean. The Cook Islands is highly vulnerable to external economic shocks, especially impacting tourism, and is prone to natural disasters, particularly cyclones. The Cook Islands has already achieved MDG 4 on reducing child mortality and MDG 5 on improving maternal health^d. However, significant challenges remain since the distribution of development benefits is uneven, especially between urban and rural areas and among the main and outer islands. While extreme poverty and hunger largely do not exist in the Cook Islands, a “poverty of opportunity” affects many communities in rural areas and the outer islands.

2. Beneficiaries. The proposed project will indirectly contribute to reducing poverty in the Cook Islands. The primary beneficiaries will include telecommunications operators and internet service providers and, ultimately, local businesses, the general public, and civil society organizations. Internet brings efficiency providing reliable ICT and reduces the cost of such social services, and enables an environment conducive to private sector investments. The submarine cable will lower the cost of communication for businesses and individuals. As a result, the general public will have better access to information and services essential for socioeconomic development. The low cost of international bandwidth is expected to open up new opportunities for revenue growth and create employment and income opportunities for the country.

The poor and vulnerable groups living in remote areas (e.g., victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and those requiring emergency medical attention) and small business owners stand to benefit indirectly the most from the project. Improved and affordable communication services in Rarotonga and Aitutaki will enable these groups to access remote social services through internet. These include women’s support groups, groups providing outreach assistance to people with disabilities and the elderly, and groups providing counseling support to victims of domestic violence. The project will also help government agencies reach their clients in the outer islands through affordable and reliable communication.

3. Impact channels. The project’s benefits to end users, including the poor, will be realized by reducing the communication cost. Lower pricing and better internet services are expected to lower the internet bandwidth cost and the telecommunication service providers will be able to provide more innovative and affordable services to the public. New businesses in general are also expected to create more employment opportunities to fuel economic growth.

4. Other social and poverty issues. The Cook Islands is a small island economy that faces the constant challenge of depopulation due to its remoteness and limited income opportunities. The project does not directly address the issue of depopulation but focuses instead, on providing reliable communication services to address the issue of remoteness. The government is addressing the issue of depopulation through various socioeconomic and governance programs under the National Sustainable Development Plan, 2016–2020 (footnote a).

5. Design Features. The project is classified as general intervention with an output of an operational submarine internet cable bringing affordable and reliable broadband internet access to the population. It will particularly improve telecommunications services in two of the most populated islands in the country to better connect them locally and internationally.

II. PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERING THE POOR

1. Participatory approaches and project activities. The project's safeguards team consulted at least 97 government and civil society members in Rarotonga and Aitutaki. On Rarotonga, about 45 people from government and civil society organizations, private sector entities, and nongovernment organizations, including village chiefs and community representatives, were consulted by the team from 22 to 31 August 2016. The team also organized a half-day stakeholders' meeting attended by at least 15 government and civil society leaders on 26 August. This was followed by a separate consultation with the paramount chiefs in Rarotonga (the House of Ariki) on 1 September 2016. On Aitutaki, about 52 people from government, including the Aitutaki Island Council; civil society organizations, including private sector organizations; religious leaders from all denominations on the island; and environmental, community, and women's organizations were consulted from 29 to 30 August 2016. Similar to Rarotonga, the team organized a half-day stakeholders' consultation attended by government and nongovernment leaders and representatives on 30 August 2016. The government will continue to consult the stakeholders during project implementation.

2. Civil society organizations. Consultations with civil society organizations were conducted during project preparation and will be continued by the government during the construction phase to disseminate information and get feedback from stakeholders.

3. The following forms of civil society organization participation are envisaged during project implementation, rated as high (H), medium (M), low (L), or not applicable (NA):

Information gathering and sharing Consultation Collaboration Partnership

4. Participation plan. Yes. No.

Civil society will have limited participation. The proposed project will focus on setting up the infrastructure to make the internet affordable and available to the general public.

III. GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Gender mainstreaming category: no gender elements

A. Key issues. Access to ICT services depends more on the availability and affordability of these services than on social factors that might disadvantage women and girls. Given the benefits and importance of ICT services, men and women need to have equal opportunities to access and use them. Improved telecommunications and access points made available in communities would enable women to easily communicate with other communities without having to travel and incur high expenses. Women would also have more access to information, leading to improved employment opportunities, better consultations and peer support, if required.

B. Key actions.

Gender action plan Other actions or measures No action or measure

Although the project is categorized as having no gender elements, awareness and consultation activities arranged by telecom service providers will always include participation of women during project implementation.

IV. ADDRESSING SOCIAL SAFEGUARD ISSUES

A. Involuntary Resettlement

Safeguard Category: A B C FI

1. Key impacts. The project has no involuntary resettlement impacts. The two project sites (Rarotonga and Aitutaki) will not require acquisition of private lands. On Rarotonga, the cable landing site and cable landing station will use vacant Crown and government-leased lands while the cable route will be buried along the easement of a public road. On Aitutaki, the project will utilize existing government-leased land for the cable station and will also be buried along the easement of an existing public road. An easement agreement will be secured from the land owners for the Rarotonga and Aitutaki cable routes. Failure to negotiate will not result in compulsory land acquisition, the government will explore alternative sites.

2. Strategy to address the impacts. Not applicable.

3. Plan or other Actions.

Resettlement plan Combined resettlement and indigenous peoples plan
 Resettlement framework Combined resettlement framework and indigenous peoples planning framework
 Environmental and social management system arrangement Social impact matrix
 No action

B. Indigenous Peoples

Safeguard Category: A B C FI

<p>1. Key impacts. The project will have no impact. Due diligence work has confirmed that the local people in the project area do not meet the ADB definition of indigenous peoples (with regard to distinctiveness and vulnerability). Is broad community support triggered? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>2. Strategy to address the impacts. Not applicable</p> <p>3. Plan or other actions.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples plan</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Combined resettlement plan and indigenous peoples plan</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples planning framework</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Combined resettlement framework and indigenous peoples planning framework</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Environmental and social management system arrangement</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples plan elements integrated in project with a summary</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Social impact matrix</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No action</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Combined resettlement plan and indigenous peoples plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples planning framework	<input type="checkbox"/> Combined resettlement framework and indigenous peoples planning framework	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental and social management system arrangement	<input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples plan elements integrated in project with a summary	<input type="checkbox"/> Social impact matrix		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No action	
<input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Combined resettlement plan and indigenous peoples plan									
<input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples planning framework	<input type="checkbox"/> Combined resettlement framework and indigenous peoples planning framework									
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental and social management system arrangement	<input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous peoples plan elements integrated in project with a summary									
<input type="checkbox"/> Social impact matrix										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No action										
V. ADDRESSING OTHER SOCIAL RISKS										
<p>A. Risks in the Labor Market</p> <p>1. Relevance of the project for the country's or region's or sector's labor market, indicated as high (H), medium (M), and low or not significant (L). <input type="checkbox"/> unemployment - L <input type="checkbox"/> underemployment - L <input type="checkbox"/> retrenchment - L <input type="checkbox"/> core labor standards - L</p> <p>2. Labor market impact. The project is expected to generate very limited local employment opportunities during construction and operation.</p>										
<p>B. Affordability</p> <p>Ongoing work on telecommunications regulations by the government, will ensure that the cost advantage of the proposed cable infrastructure is passed on to the general public by the local telecommunications operators.</p>										
<p>C. Communicable Diseases and Other Social Risks</p> <p>1. The impact of the following risks are rated as high (H), medium (M), low (L), or not applicable (NA): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> L Communicable diseases <input type="checkbox"/> Human trafficking <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) _____</p> <p>2. Risks to people in project area.</p>										
VI. MONITORING AND EVALUATION										
<p>Monitoring will ensure that no affected persons will be disadvantaged during the easement negotiations. The government will include reporting on the progress of securing an easement agreement for the Rarotonga and Aitutaki cable routes prior to construction. Also, the government will include submission of quarterly progress reports on overall project activities to ADB.</p>										

ADB = Asian Development Bank, ICT = information and communication technology, MDG = Millennium Development Goal, PMU = project management unit.

Source: Asian Development Bank.

^a Government of the Cook Islands, Prime Minister's Office, Central Policy and Planning Office. 2016. *Te Kaveinga Nui: National Sustainable Development Plan, 2016–2020*. Rarotonga.

^b ADB. 2016. *Pacific Approach, 2016–2020*. Manila.

^c Government of the Cook Islands, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management. 2015. *Cook Islands: National Infrastructure Investment Plan*. Rarotonga.

^d United Nations Development Programme; MDGs in Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau.
<http://www.ws.undp.org/content/samoa/en/home/post-2015/mdgoverview.html>