



PacREF(21)1

12th FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETING

The University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Fiji
13-14 April 2021 (Virtual Meeting)

OUTCOMES DOCUMENT

1. Ministers of Education of the Pacific Islands Forum member countries met for their 12th meeting which was held virtually, on 13 – 14 April 2021, with the theme, ***“Building Resilient in Pacific Education Systems”***. In attendance were Ministers of Education from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Nauru, Niue, New Zealand, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tokelau, Tonga and together with representatives from Samoa, Solomon Islands, Palau, Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. CROP agencies were represented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community – Education Quality Assessment Programme (SPC-EQAP), The University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). Development Partners included representatives from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Australia-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). A full list of participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

2. Members of civil society organisations participated at the 12th FEEdMM for the first time showing the inclusivity principle as a guiding driver of the new Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF). Their participation was consultative and were given the opportunity to report to the Ministers on the outcomes of their forum.

SESSION ONE: OFFICIAL OPENING

(i) Opening Prayer

3. The Acting Vice Chancellor & President (A/VCP) of the University of the South Pacific, Dr Giulio Masasso Paunga called the meeting to order.

4. Reverend Semisi Turagavou of the Methodist Church in Fiji conducted the devotion.

Opening remarks

5. The USP A/VCP warmly welcomed the Ministers and participants to the 12th Forum Education Ministers Meeting (12th FEEdMM). He thanked the Ministers for availing themselves to participate in the meeting and continuing their important role as the oversight group for making decisions on regional education. The A/VCP informed the meeting that this was the first FEEdMM to be convened by the USP taking over from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). It is unfortunate it had to be held virtually due to travel restriction brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. The transition of roles between PIFS and USP in the regional education architecture is an understanding among the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) regarding their expertise and mandates and to provide the best support to the implementation of regional frameworks.

7. The A/VCP reiterated USP's commitment to PacREF as host to the PacREF Facilitating Unit (PFU) by providing the necessary support towards the Unit to ensure its effective functioning. USP as an implementing agency will provide its expertise in areas of teacher training and development, curriculum development, research and learning resource development in the implementation of its activities.

8. In delivering her opening remarks, the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Dame Meg Taylor, acknowledged the work of the Pacific Regional Education Framework Facilitating Unit under the leadership of the University of the South Pacific to convene this meeting as well as the Council for Regional Organisations in the Pacific Human Resource Development Working Group (CROP HRD WG), for leading the implementation of PacREF and securing funding for the Programme.

9. The Secretary General asked Ministers to recall the 2018 Quadrennial Report on the Sustainable Development Goals for the Pacific, which raised concerns on the quality and relevance of education and cognitive learning outcomes in our region but was encouraged by efforts to ensure progress towards improved education systems, increased access to education for all children, and improved quality of curricula for better outcomes.

10. The Secretary General highlighted the development of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific continent where consultations reaffirmed that education at all levels was a critical enabler for the achievement of our long-term vision and objectives.

(ii) Election of Chair and Vice Chair

11. The A/VCP conducted the election of the Chair and Vice Chair. In accordance with FEEdMM tradition, the Tuvalu Minister for Education was proposed as Chair as they were meant to host the meeting in 2020 but deferred due to COVID-19. However, due to illness, the Tuvalu Minister was unable to take up the chairmanship. **Hon Rosy Akbar** (Fiji Minister of Education,

Heritage and Arts), **Hon Aupito William Sio** (New Zealand Minister of Education – Pacific People), **Hon Sauni Tongatule** (Niue Minister of Education) and **Hon Kitlang Kabua** (Republic of the Marshall Islands Minister of Education) were proposed as co-chairs for the 12th FE_dMM. Ministers unanimously concurred with the proposal.

(iii) Adoption of Agenda

12. The Hon Sio of New Zealand chaired the first Session. He called upon the PacREF Coordinator to introduce the meeting draft Programme Agenda and Working Procedures. Ministers after considering the draft agenda and working procedures adopted the meeting's Programme Agenda, and proposed Working Procedures in addition to the proposal by Cook Islands on the change of name of the Ministerial meeting from FE_dMM to Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM) to be discussed during the Ministerial Retreat.

(iv) Talanoa Session

13. A *Talanoa* session was part of the opening session of the meeting. The Ministers who were part of the panel for the Talanoa session were from Niue (Polynesia), Republic of the Marshall Islands (Micronesia) and Fiji (Melanesia). The session was facilitated by the Kiribati High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency David Teabo.

14. Issues raised at the session included the challenges posed by COVID-19. Whilst countries had adapted to digital learning as a measure against impacts of COVID-19, there were still numerous challenges including traditional mode of learning vs e-learning; effects of climate change such as increased frequency of natural disasters which impacted student learning.

SESSION TWO: WORKSHOP

15. Two papers were presented during this session which were intended to brief Ministers on the development and implementation of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) since the 2018 FE_dMM and provide highlights on the status of Pacific education through various indicators for SDG4 and PacREF.

Briefing paper on PacREF development and implementation since the 2018 FE_dMM.

16. Sessions Two and Three were chaired by Hon Tongatule of Niue. The first paper was presented by the Coordinator, PacREF Facilitating Unit (PFU). It highlighted the purpose, rationale, guiding principles and focus areas of the PacREF Programme. The presentation also highlighted the intended outcomes of PacREF, how it is being resourced and governance structure. The brief was intended to create greater awareness among Ministers of the PacREF programme and its implementation strategies to enable them to participate fully in the programme in line with their oversight role within its governance structure.

17. In their discussions, Ministers raised the issue of data collection to support the needs of Pacific countries. Ministers also highlighted the issues of funding sustainability for PacREF and the change of name of the FEdMM to Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM). These two latter issues were to be discussed during the Ministerial Retreat. **Please refer to Ministerial Retreat Outcome document on decision.**

The Status of Pacific Education Report 2020

18. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community - Education Quality Assessment Programme (SPC-EQAP) presented on the **Status of Pacific Education Report 2020** based on educational indicators categorized into the four policy areas of the PacREF. This is the second Status of Pacific Education Report being presented to FEdMM with the first at the 2018 11th FEdMM.

19. Ministers in their discussions noted the encouraging trends related to an increase in children attending some form of early childhood education, completing primary education, and significant improvements in literacy and numeracy levels for primary students over the last three PILNA assessments. Ministers also noted that whilst the report was encouraging, a sustained focus was required for the long-term. Sharing information and techniques, particularly from better performing countries, was identified as an approach to address challenges highlighted in the report. Teacher oversight including but not limited to teacher training, workforce supply and demand of teachers were identified by members as areas needing greater attention.

Decision

20. **Ministers:**

- (i) **agreed** to share their annual national education reports for the purpose of reporting at regional and global forums; and
- (ii) **tasked** SPC to continue working with UNESCO to develop a mechanism to collect annual data, and report back to Education Ministers for their endorsement.

SESSION THREE: RESOURCE PAPERS TO THE MINISTERIAL RETREAT

21. Ministers in Session Three were presented with two papers which were to provide them with information relevant to the theme of the meeting “*Building resilience in Pacific education systems*”. The papers did not present any recommendations for a decision by Ministers as they were simply for information and preparing Ministers for their retreat.

Paper 1: Impact of COVID-19 on Education in 15 Pacific Small Island Countries

22. The paper was presented by UNESCO Apia Office. It provided a brief background of the impact of COVID-19 on the education systems in the Pacific during 2020. The paper also highlighted some of the procedures and policies put in place by the Pacific island countries to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on education delivery and reduction in school hours. Based on the regional and global experience, the paper suggested some areas for consideration to enhance resilience in education systems.

23. Ministers in their discussions highlighted the importance of pedagogy during the COVID-19 experience. In utilizing multiple learning platforms, it was critical that education quality was not compromised over the need for continuity of education.

Paper 2: Resilience in education

24. The paper was presented by UNICEF providing some background information and concepts of resilience and disaster risk reduction from a number of contexts including the Pacific region. The paper also discussed a number of frameworks related to resilience and education which are designed to guide countries develop their own national disaster risk strategies to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters particularly on education.

25. In their discussions Ministers deliberated on the sustainability of Pacific peoples' resilience in the face of increasing disasters and the advent of COVID-19. Whilst Pacific people have shown great resilience it is also important to look at innovative approaches to support their ability to manage these strains.

SESSION FOUR: RETREAT

26. The afternoon session was the retreats where Ministers, officials and civil society organisations separated into and held their different forums. The retreats were focused on the theme of the meeting – *Building Resilience in Pacific education systems*.

27. Refer to the report from the retreats for further information on the retreat discussions and decisions.

WEDNESDAY 14 April

SESSION FIVE: PLENARY

28. The beginning of the sessions for the second day, Session Five was Chaired by Hon Rosy Akbar, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Fiji.

Message from the CEO, Global Partnership on Education

29. A pre-recorded video message from Ms Alice Albright, the Chief Executive Officer of the GPE was played as an opening remark during the second day of the meeting.

(i) Ministerial Retreat Report

30. Ministers held their closed session during the afternoon of Tuesday 13 April. The retreat was Chaired by Hon Kitlang Kabua of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. At the retreat, Ministers considered the recommendations from paper *PacREF(21) FEdMM.03* in regards to the recommendation for a name change to their forum.

31. In their decision on the recommendation, Ministers:

- (i) ***agreed in principle*** to the recommendation for the change of name of their forum from *Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEdMM)* to *Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM)*.
- (ii) ***agreed*** to engage with civil society organisations in a consultative approach and requested the Secretariat to develop guidelines in regards to the engagement which should also include a clear *Terms of Reference* for the CPEM defining its role and engagement strategies.

32. In terms of setting priorities for Phase 2 of the implementation rolling plan, *Ministers decided for a review of Phase 1 implementation be undertaken towards the end of the year and the report tabled for their discussion in the first quarter of 2022 which will then inform decisions on Phase 2 priorities.*

Sharing of national experiences of Covid-19

33. *Ministers shared their national experiences in tackling the impacts of Covid-19 on education. In their sharing Ministers highlighted the following:*

- (i) *The need to ensure that in the development of strategies to tackle the impact of Covid-19, quality of education must not be compromised.*
- (ii) *Countries shared common challenges around access and quality education and ensuring the right infrastructure is in place to provide continuity of learning for all children.*

- (iii) Pathways connecting students to education, vocational pathways and accelerating student achievement for those not achieving required standard of learning achievement. PILNA since 2012 has regularly reviewed strategies to meet this need.*
- (iv) Building resilient systems and capacity to continue education in the face of pandemics and natural disasters.*
- (v) Teaching, learning and preparation, reality for closed borders.*

Issues regarding USP

34. Ministers **agreed** that issues and concerns that were raised around USP Council Matters, should be raised in a Forum Education Ministerial Statement to be drafted and forwarded to USP Council for consideration. It was recommended for the issue to be raised to the Forum Leaders' attention.

(ii) Officials Retreat

35. Education Officials held their forum in the afternoon of Tuesday 13 April. In their deliberations, Officials considered the important lessons learned through the PacREF design and key considerations for the design of PacREF Phase 2. Officials also considered that PacREF contains an explicit causal chain of strengthening Pacific regionalism, through new ways in which regional education agencies work together.

36. Officials reflected on their experiences with respect to skills development and TVET training, and acknowledged the support provided by development partners in supporting skills development programmes in their countries. Recognising the potential and actual contribution of TVET and skills development to addressing Covid-19 impacts, Officials supported the inclusion of TVET in Phase 2 of the implementation rolling plan, including the importance of incorporating TVET and skills development initiatives in their COVID-19 recovery strategies and actions.

Sharing of COVID-19 experiences

37. There was a rich sharing of experiences by countries in tackling the impacts of COVID-19 on national education systems. Various strategies were put in place to ensure continuity of learning. Some challenges were also discussed, and countries continue to seek means of alleviating those challenges.

38. Outcomes of the Officials Forum, including considered recommendations are included as **Annex 2**.

(iii) Civil Society Organisation Retreat

39. Ministers noted the outcomes of the CSO Forum which are included as **Annex 3**.

Business Papers

Paper 1: PacREF Research Framework

40. The draft PacREF Research Framework was presented by USP. The development of the Framework has been a collaborative effort of the implementing agencies led by USP. The Framework has been contextualised for the Pacific context recognising the traditional and cultural practices of the various Pacific countries including their values and ethics.

41. The Research Framework is being developed as a guide to any research to be undertaken under the PacREF programme and supported by the PacREF processes and governance structures. The Framework encourages all researchers conducting research in the Pacific to be cognisant of research policies and ethics of Pacific countries and align accordingly.

Decision:

42. *Ministers:*

- (i) ***endorsed*** the Research Framework; and
- (ii) ***encouraged*** all researchers undertaking research in the policy areas of PacREF to adhere to the requirements of the Framework particularly to observe Pacific cultural and traditional practices and respect for Pacific values when undertaking research.

43. From here on the Chair was passed on to the Hon Kabua, Minister of Education Republic of the Marshall Islands, who Chaired until the end of the meeting.

Paper 2: Portability of Qualifications - the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

44. The paper on the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* was presented by UNESCO Apia Office. The presentation highlighted the purpose and benefits gained by countries in committing to the implementation of the Convention particularly as it ensures the right of individuals to have their higher education and skills qualifications assessed for the purpose of further education or employment. It also highlights the growing need and relevance for the Pacific states to support portability of qualifications in view of increasing mobility of students, faculty, and scholars in higher education within the Pacific and globally. The Convention intends to contribute to quality assurance of higher education through international exchange of experience and resources.

45. Ministers in their discussions considered the linkages between national actions, the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, also

known as the Tokyo Convention, and the Global Convention. Work on the Regional Convention has already taken place in some countries.

Decision:

46. *Ministers:*

- (i) ***agreed*** to build better understanding on the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, 2019, through taking part in regional virtual sessions and other means with universities, the Pacific Heads of Education System, and other important partners from across the Pacific;
- (ii) ***agreed*** as UNESCO Member States in the Pacific to upscale support in achieving the objectives and principles addressed in Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, 2019 through its ratification; and
- (iii) collectively ***committed*** to providing quality Higher Education accessible by all, regardless of gender, physical, geographical, social, or economic discrepancies

Paper 3: Regional SDG 4 Benchmarking exercise (Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030+)

47. The paper presented by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) highlighted the importance of establishing regional benchmarks for SDG4 and PacREF indicators and establishing a process for the exercise. The paper argues that setting regional benchmarks would be very useful for UNESCO Member States to develop appropriate policies and strategies to achieve the key targets as well to steer regional and international organizations assistance towards improving availability and quality of key data against those targets.

48. The paper also stresses that the adoption of regional benchmarks requires the political commitment of the Ministers of Education and technical leadership of the members of the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES).

49. Ministers in their discussions noted that some countries have already developed their own national benchmarks and that regional benchmarking will support national efforts. UNESCO was requested to strengthen support to Pacific countries and be more rigorous in data collection to ensure that the region is accurately represented in regional and global reporting.

50. Whilst global benchmarking is useful, Ministers noted that data collection can be strenuous for smaller nations. To lessen this burden, countries can focus on key priorities that can be useful for their own policy development and monitoring. Ministers noted that the efforts on benchmarking can be harmonised with the current work undertaken by SPC-EQAP.

Decision:

51. *Ministers:*

- (i) **agreed** to the development of regional benchmarks for bridging the national, regional and global processes in monitoring and reporting of SDG 4;
- (ii) **supported** harmonization of methodologies, tools, and periodicity of reporting on progress of SDG 4; and
- (iii) **tasked** the UIS and SPC to provide a comprehensive update on progress of SDG4 based on regional benchmarks in the next FEdMM

Paper 4: Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF)

52. The development of the draft PRIEF was coordinated by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in close collaboration with USP and Pacific Disability Forum (PDF). This development is an outcome of the 2014 FEdMM where a proposal to develop a regional inclusive education framework was approved by Ministers. The presentation of the draft PRIEF was done by PDF, USP and UNICEF.

53. The draft Framework was presented to the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) in April 2019 in Niue where they endorsed for presentation to FEdMM. However, conditional to their approval was for specific work to be completed prior to presentation of the framework to FEdMM. Such work included making sure the Framework is inclusive of all learners and the completion of a mapping exercise between PRIEF and PacREF.

54. The presentation highlighted the 5 key priorities of the Framework:
- (i) *Enabling Policies & Legislation*
 - (ii) *Raising Awareness*
 - (iii) *Training and Professional Learning*
 - (iv) *Strengthening Partnership*
 - (v) *Inclusive Practices and Accessibility*

55. As part of the development, a regional review of inclusive education in the Pacific was undertaken providing useful baseline information and the high-level findings of the review was appended to the paper. An Inclusive Education Taskforce has also been established as part of the development process and includes country membership.

56. Ministers in their discussions thanked the Taskforce for the work carried out behind the scenes on Inclusive Education. Ministers called for resourcing of the Taskforce and representation at Ministerial level.

Decision:

57. Ministers:

- (i) *endorsed the PRIEF as a guiding document to Pacific Education when supporting planning at national and regional levels, including through PacREF; and*
- (ii) *agreed to Ministerial level representation from the three sub-regions on the Inclusive Education Taskforce.*

Paper 5: Early Childhood Education in the Pacific

58. The paper was prepared and presented by UNICEF Pacific. It provided some background information on early childhood education development in the Pacific and its importance in the holistic development of the child. The importance of a holistic approach to ECE was discussed and the need for governments to invest in this important education subsector.

59. The paper made reference to the regional initiative approved by Forum Leaders on Early Childhood Development (ECD), however, the importance of continuing current efforts in ECE need to be maintained. Ministers were informed that the Pacific Regional Taskforce on ECE was established under the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development (PRC4ECD) is mandated to support and guide ECE regional initiatives. A baseline on ECE status in the Pacific was presented in a Status Report in 2017, with an update of the report due in 2021, which should be tabled at PHES in 2021.

Decision:

60. Ministers:

- (i) *supported the continuation of current regional efforts in the development of ECE within the wider Education sector, as well as within ECD, in collaboration with the Pacific Early Learning Taskforce of PRC4ECD; and*
- (ii) *directed PHES to receive the upcoming status report on ECE in the region and consider recommendations to the next FEdMM.*

SESSION SIX: CLOSURE

(i) Meeting Outcomes Document

61. Ministers cleared the outcomes document for the meeting as presented by the Secretariat.

(ii) Release of Papers:

62. Ministers **agreed** to the release of meeting papers as recommended.

(iii) Next Meeting

63. The New Zealand delegation offered to host the first Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM) in 2023. The offer was well received by Ministers thus, the first Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM) will be hosted by New Zealand in Wellington, 2023.

Closing

64. The Chair thanked the Honourable Ministers, Senior Officials and delegates for their attendance and participation. The Chair also thanked the University of the South Pacific and PacREF Facilitating Unit for the organisation of the meeting.

65. Before ending the meeting with a prayer, the Coordinator – PFU expressed the appreciation of the USP A/VCP and DVC to the Ministers for their commitment and participation at the meeting. It has been a very successful meeting. The meeting was then closed with a word of prayer prayer.

66. The Ministers then held a closed session to consider and finalise their Statement to the USP Council.

PacREF Facilitating Unit
14 April 2021



FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS MEETING

University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Fiji

13-14 April 2021

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

AUSTRALIA

Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja
Minister
International Development and the Pacific

Rochelle White
Counsellor
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Australian High Commission, Suva

Tina Seniloli
Senior Programme Manager –Education
Australian High Commission, Suva

COOK ISLANDS

Hon. Vaine Mokoroa
Minister
Ministry of Education

Ms Danielle Cochrane
Secretary
Ministry of Education

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

Mr. Wayne Mendiola
A/Secretary - Minister
National Department of Education

Arthur Albert
Director
National Department of Education

FIJI

Hon Rosy Akbar

Minister

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

Mr Timoci Bure

Head

National Education Service Delivery

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Hon. Christelle Lehartel

Minister

Minister of Education, Civil Service and Administration, Digital Economy.

KIRIBATI

Hon. Alexander Teabo

Minister

Ministry of Education

Ms Bwakura Metutera Timeon

Secretary

Ministry of Education

NAURU

Hon. Richard-Hyde Menke

Deputy Minister

Minister of Education & Training

Ms Darrina Kun

Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Education and Training

NEW ZEALAND

Hon Aupito Williams Sio

Minister

Ministry of Education – Pacific People

Ms Amy McAteer

Lead Adviser - Education

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Mrs. Anna Pasikale

Unit Manager – Human Development

Mrs. Vena-Liz Upton

Senior Adviser – Education

Ms. Amy Shanks
Adviser – Education

NIUE
Hon. Sauni Tongatule
Minister
Ministry of Education

Birtha Togahai
Director
Ministry of Education

PALAU

Mr Ray Mechol
Director
Bureau of Education Administration

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

Hon. Kitlang Kabua
Minister for Education
Ministry of Education, Sport and Training

Mr. Kanchi Hosia
Commissioner, Public School System
Ministry of Education, Sport and Training

SAMOA

Dr Karoline Afamasaga-Fuata'i
Chief Executive Officer
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Ms Vau Peseta
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Dr Franco Rodie
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education, Human Resources Development

TONGA

Hon Siaosi Sovaleni
Minister

Ministry of Education

Dr Tangikina Moimoi Steen

Chief Executive Officer

Ministry of Education

TUVALU

Dr. Tufoua Panapa

Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

Enele Epati

Actg Director

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

VANUATU

Joses Seth

Executive Officer

Office of the Director General

Ministry of Education

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

TOKELAU

Hon. Kelihiano Kalolo

Minister

Ministry of Education

Ms Elaine Lameta

Director

Ministry of Education

Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP)

University of the South Pacific (USP)

Dr Giulio Masasso Paunga

A/Vice-Chancellor and President

Dr Jito Vanualailai

Deputy Vice Chancellor

Associate Professor Ann Cheryl Armstrong

School of Education

Dr Seu'ula Johanssen Fua

Director

Institute of Education

Susan Sela

Director
Pacific TAFE

Filipe Jitoko

Coordinator
PacREF Facilitating Unit
Secretariat

Pacific Community (SPC)

Dr. Michelle Belisle

Director
Educational Quality and Assessment Programme

Agustin De la Varga

Principal Adviser
Education Quality Assessment Programme

Seci Waqabaca

PacREF Implementation Adviser
Education Quality Assessment Programme

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)

Dame Meg Taylor

Secretary General

Mr. Paki Ormsby

Director
Policy and Development

Ms Manaini Rokovunisei

Social Policy Adviser
Policy and Development

Ms Talei Tuinamuana

Social Policy Officer
Policy and Development

Ms Sylvia Waqabaca-Waqanivavalagi

Research Officer
Policy and Development

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Asia Development Bank (ADB)

Mr Per Berjegen

Australian-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC)

Ms. Janelle Chapman
Interim Chief Executive Officer

Ms. Lori Banks Dutta
Deputy CEO

Mr. Alfred Schuster
Development Effectiveness Adviser

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

Ms. NISHA
Director of Office and Representative to the Pacific States

Dr. Aya Aoki
Education Programme Specialist

Dr. Roshan Bajracharya
Senior Regional Advisor (UIS)

United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Ms Anna Smeby
Chief
Education Division

Ms Gail Townsend
Technical Adviser (Education)

REPORT FROM THE OFFICIALS FORUM

SESSION 1

ACER presentation

- (i) The review highlighted some areas that needs to be considered under Phase 2 of PacREF implementation. These include higher education and critical skills development.
- (ii) The officials noted that the criteria for GPE funding placed some restrictions on areas in education which need to be considered in Phase 2.

Recommendations:

- (i) That members of the Officials Forum are requested to:
- (ii) Note the important lessons learned through the PacREF design and key considerations for the design of PacREF Phase 2
- (iii) Note that PacREF contains an explicit causal chain of strengthening Pacific regionalism, through new ways in which regional education agencies work together

APTC presentation

The role of TVET and Skills for employment in addressing COVID-19 impacts

APTC presentation highlighted opportunities TVET and skills development could bring to addressing employment and economic growth outcomes for Pacific Island Countries in the face of COVID-19 impacts.

The impact of COVID-19 on the way we work has seen a heavy reliance on digital and virtual platforms to support remote working arrangements. Digital transformation has overnight become the norm in many countries. Pacific economies could benefit from rising digital economy through greater emphasis and investment in digital skills training and infrastructure.

Recommendations

Elevate TVET and Skills for employment in Regional and National Policy Discussions

- a. Higher priority and greater attention is needed to elevate skills development within the policy discussions of Pacific governments and between Pacific governments and their development partners in the context of COVID-19
- b. Institutionalise a human-centric skills agenda that looks ahead, investing in accelerating progress in implementing the intent of the Pacific Leaders in existing regional declarations and commitments to address the continuing inequality of women and persons with disability
- c. Have providers who can train to fill in the skills gaps

Ensure TVET and skills for employment, including through labour mobility, are included in national and regional economic recovery strategies

- a. Realign training priorities to address key skills shortages in those sectors expected to lead to employment and economic growth in the post-COVID-19 period
- b. Increase focus on the core skills required for a well-educated workforce including ‘work ready skills’ and a range of other core skills in management, administration, leadership and ICT
- c. Prioritise youth, women and persons with disability

Build Back a Better Pacific TVET System

- a. The current situation also offers potential opportunities to improve skills and skills development systems, to achieve the ‘new normal’
- b. Creating the enabling environment for a Pacific Skills System that is:
 - (i) Pacific led and underpinned by strategic and multi-stakeholder partnerships and coalitions;
 - (ii) Responsive to new policy areas;
 - (iii) Delivering greater equity in training and employment opportunities for all;
 - (iv) Driven by evidence based labour market information systems;
 - (v) Leveraging the opportunities in the TVET sector from the increased connectivity; and
 - (vi) Equipped with more innovative and sustainable training systems, including strengthening capability and capacity of national TVET institutions

Comments received

- *Countries reflected on their experiences with respect to skills development and TVET training.*
- *Countries acknowledged the support provided by APTC in supporting the Skills development programmes in their countries.*
- *There was a strong recommendation from officials in the consideration of TVET in Phase 2 of the implementation rolling plan.*

SESSION 2: Sharing of COVID-19 experiences

- (i) *Tokelau* – has repatriated all students from around the region. Most are learning online, some have had to defer their studies. Biggest challenge is navigating gateways to send students back to re-start their studies. It has been helpful that regional tertiary institutions structured courses to enable online learning, however this has not been as helpful for those taking practical courses. Also a challenge of lockdown – highlighted the inequity of access to digital technology and inequity of resources in homes. Remaining challenge is on teachers and digital pedagogy.
- (ii) *Vanuatu*: has Human Resources Development plan for skills partnership and government policy to develop TVET programs in schools

- (iii) *Tonga*: Tonga had two days trial of multi-modal delivery of training and resources to students. Teachers had to prepare material for students for those two days. Report was completed. This was to test if resources and training could be delivered in a lockdown/work from home scenario. After two trial days, Tonga applied for GPE funding and is collecting issues from the trial days and using that to ensure that resources are available in multi-modal format as well as blended format. Working with Save the Children Australia on this and coordinating agent on the ground is DFAT. A lot of work done and still to be done to ensure that Tonga is ready for COVID-19.
- (iv) *Samoa*: blessed to not have a positive case on COVID-19 and thankful for the support of UNICEF ensuring Samoa is on track x 200+ television radio to colleges and provide resources for primary and secondary and through the support provide zoom schools facilitated from the offices which is ongoing. This is to train principles should Samoa have a positive case of COVID-19. Also, using capacity inhouse for panel meetings and use websites to share initiatives and research and thankful for support and working with UNICEF for contingency for schools.
- (v) *French Polynesia*: closed schools for a month and faced difficulties with operating online. The more vulnerable students lost contact during this time. Some students faced psychological difficulty and students have not all been able to return to school.
- (vi) *New Zealand*: quick to move to alternative modes of learning; next phase is looking at resilience of people (as opposed to resilience of systems) particularly in relation to coping mechanisms, etc.
- (vii) *Tonga*: heightened awareness on COVID-19, and at the same time was faced with Tropical Cyclone Harold. Ministry was conscious that it needed to respond quickly. Quick moves to demystify fear of pandemic and raise awareness on sanitization protocols, including by a church minister and team. Counselors visit schools and address issues related to pandemic with students and their families.
- (viii) *Palau*: many lost jobs leading to a lot of fear and stress within families. Family check in surveys were conducted and connected them with counselors from Ministry of Health. Ministry also supported some families that needed assistance with food and supplies and other essential support.
- (ix) *FSM*: decision to close down almost all services including education. A lot of the areas in the FSM strategic plan were implemented even in the time of COVID, including digital learning. States have since worked on developing learning materials, distance learning, radio announcements. Concern that arose was that when learning materials were being developed, maybe also look at training parents who would be assisting students. Some materials have been completed and stand ready to be used in case COVID comes to one of the islands. Currently, statewide assessments are taking place to measure literacy and numeracy at Grades 4, 6, 8 and 10. They are anticipating a drop in the performance of students. Impact of student performance already being seen when schools closed from some assessments.
- (x) *Kiribati*: still COVID-free but contingency and disaster preparedness plan are ready. Acknowledged support of GPE and UNICEF in the formulation of these plans. No disruption in Kiribati after outbreak of COVID. There was an advanced school break,

to address public concerns. This break was only two weeks and has not affected academic year.

- (xi) *Cook Islands*: virus-free. No schools have been closed. Advanced school break but academic year was rearranged to accommodate that. Not all Cook Island families have access to internet or enough devices. Envisage considerable strain will be placed on parents if working from home is required as they will also need to oversee the home-based learning programme (isolated teaching model) for children if a lockdown situation occurred. Threat of COVID is not only education, it is also social. There is a heightened level of anxiety. Student and teacher wellbeing strategies are in place. A positive outcome of the economic response plan for the Cook Islands is the Fees Free Initiative for tertiary education adult learners to engage themselves in learning and acquire a new skill, especially for those who have lost employment due to COVID.
- (xii) *Republic of Marshall Islands*: performed lockdown simulations for schools; developed learning packets for public schools around RMI; condensed school calendar – school will end in mid-May; use of SolarSPELL to share learning packets. RMI remains COVID-free, there have been some border cases but are cleared now.
- (xiii) *Nauru*: remains COVID-free. Still in planning, preparedness and prevention stage. Messages shared on frequent hand washing and COVID protocols. Responded to need for more sinks. Learning packages have been prepared. No disruption to schools. Main disruption has been to tertiary students - scholarships have been suspended and students have had to return home from regional institutions.
- (xiv) UNICEF and UNESCO thanked officials for the opportunity to hear from them. Kiribati highlighted that implementation plans require resourcing to ensure proper implementation.
- (xv) Kiribati happy with the support of UNESCO on the implementation plan which is almost ready for endorsement. Note members may also have similar plans and the challenge with human resources
- (xvi) DFAT raised the need to strengthen psychological support for our children who are affected by any form of crisis
- (xvii) Tonga hopes things will improve once people are vaccinated. Acknowledged the hard work across the region and ensuring resilience and our students are not left behind.

Statement and Recommendations from the Civil Society Forum

Preamble:

Civil Society Organisations in the Pacific met online over the past month, culminating in the Civil Society Forum parallel session held on 13 April 2021 as part of the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting (FEEdMM).

The Civil Society Forum respectfully makes the following statement and recommendations for the consideration of the Forum Education Ministers.

We welcome the invitation by the Forum Education Ministers, for the inclusion of Pacific Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) committed to education, to engage in the FEEdMM process, with the support of the PacREF Facilitation Unit (PFU).

We support the implementation of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF), its stated alignment with SDG4, which is to '*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*', and its strategic objective to achieve the four key areas of quality and relevance, learning pathways, student outcomes and wellbeing, and teacher professionalism.

The need to scale up efforts to achieve these goals is even more urgent in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will require the concerted effort of all stakeholders at the regional, national and local levels, and CSOs are ready to play their part.

Recommendations

CSOs in the Pacific make the following 4 key recommendations for the consideration of Ministers:

1. Education Financing

We urge all Education Ministers to lobby to ensure that national education budgets are protected and preferably increased at this crucial time. Education is a key vehicle for enabling countries to become resilient and to recover, and it needs to be prioritised for funding in COVID-19 recovery programs. Without further funding, many of the PacREF and SDG4 targets will not be met.

Funding is needed to build resilience and capacity in national education systems and infrastructure, as well as to implement a range of national and local education programs that are currently not sufficiently resourced.

2. Inclusive Education

We urge all Education Ministers to ensure that priority be given to those who are missing out on and excluded from receiving good quality education. The most vulnerable and marginalised groups have the least resources to survive and recover. These groups include rural and remote communities, people with disabilities, illiterate adults, out of school youth, and minorities such as LGBTQI groups. We need to better understand and overcome the barriers to education faced by women and girls in the Pacific. We urge a renewed commitment to allocate resources to ensure there is no one left behind in education. We

also urge the Ministers to approve the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF) as a guiding document to Pacific Education when supporting planning at national and regional levels, including through PacREF.

3. Addressing the Gaps in achieving SDG4 and PacREF

We urge all Education Ministers to address the many gaps in achieving SDG4 and PacREF.

This includes:

- Increasing provision and access to early childhood care and education;
- Improving literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary education;
- Inclusive curriculum with a holistic approach that is grounded in culture, language, identity and safeguarding of our natural resources;
- Improving national education data collection;
- Culturally and contextually relevant use of education technologies,
- Community learning opportunities for youth, adults and the elderly;
- Further and special training and professional development for teachers to ensure that teachers are treated as professionals
- Teaching of Pacific literacies, environmental education, climate justice and critical thinking skills;
- To invest in next generation leadership capacity enhancement with required consistent support and commitment.
- Investing in physical literacy and integrating physical education, physical activity and sport in school policies and practices to strengthen life-long health, wellness and quality of life.
- Vulnerability of our education system due to commercialization of education
- Strengthening the role of USP as a leading education institution in the region

4. Greater CSO participation and engagement in education policy and programs

While this opportunity to engage with the Forum Education Ministers at their FEdMM meeting is very welcome, CSO's need to be resourced and supported and play their ongoing role in regional and national education policy and program development. This includes ensuring strong CSO participation in national education policy consultation and implementation – ensuring it is inclusive to include all Pacific countries across the Oceania.

Apart from these four key recommendations, other important points were made during the CSO Forum. Some attachments are provided with more detail on particular education policy areas for your consideration. In addition to enhancing the contribution of civil society, we support stronger engagement and partnership with national tertiary institutions in the implementation of the PacREF Framework in addition building capacity at USP in learning and teaching across the education sector.

In conclusion, through this FEdMM CSO Forum, CSOs in the Pacific that are committed to strengthened education policy. We thank the Forum Education Ministers for their ongoing work and for considering these civil society comments and recommendations. CSOs look forward to ongoing collaboration to make the PacREF strategies and SDG4 targets a reality.