



12TH FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS MEETING

ICT Video Conference Room 1, University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Fiji

13 - 14 April 2021

SESSION THREE: Impact of COVID-19 on Education in 15 Pacific Small Island Countries

RESOURCE PAPER – MINISTERIAL RETREAT

(PacREF(21) FEdMM.05 Impacts of COVID-19 on Education in 15 Pacific Small Island Countries)

(Theme: Building Resilience in Pacific Education Systems)

(The resource paper has been prepared by UNESCO, Apia Office.)

Title/Topic	Impact of COVID-19 on Education in 15 Pacific Small Island Countries
Presenting Agency/Unit	UNESCO Apia Office
Purpose of the Brief	The brief is to provide Ministers information on how Covid-19 have impacted the education sectors in the Pacific Small islands States (P-SIDS) and attempts by governments to mitigate such impacts. The brief also provides possible medium to long term policy interventions put in place by countries as learninmoving forward based in international experiences and which will be further discussed at the Ministerial Retreat.

Background:

- COVID-19 created an unprecedented damage on global economy and practically every single sector beyond health. Education was not an exception – it has wrecked the delivery of education system forcing the closure of schools, affecting millions of students globally and created stress on our educational systems at all levels.
- School closures, even temporary, are challenging for copious reasons. Foremost, there is a reduction in instructional time, which impacts learning attainment and achievement. Disrupting schooling also leads to other immeasurable losses, such as extra burden of childcare and support needs by families, decreased productivity and increased physical and mental stress for all generations in the society. The school closures also compound educational inequities as economically disadvantaged families would have less resources to fill learning gaps and provide supplemental activities for children who cannot attend school.
- Furthermore, the education disruption has had, and will continue to have, substantial effects beyond education. Closures of educational institutions hamper the provision of essential services to children and communities, including access to nutritious food, increase risks of domestic violence and abuse against women and children, and social-emotional distress among youth resulting in undesirable behaviors (United Nations, 2020).

Summary

Many of the Pacific island nations have had formulated policies and procedures as precautionary measures and logistics in place such as:

- COVID-19 Education Contingency and Response Plan Framework
- Extended school holidays
- Staggered the opening of the schools
- Student home study packages
- Distance learning through use of radio and television
- Emergency transition to online and blended learning wherever possible
- COVID-19 Response Budget to cover immediate needs of the countries

Based on the assessment of 15 Pacific small island countries' impact and some of responses to COVID-19 and regional and international literature, the following recommendations are summarized as common areas that require attention in education in the region.

Ministers are invited to note:

- The nature and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic warrants an immediate response to the urgent educational needs caused by the pandemic, as well as medium- to long-term considerations and planning in the process of economic recovery and sustainable development.
- In this endeavor, we must take a special attention to a holistic approach to pedagogy, i.e. interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment and the learning tasks to ensure learning objectives of all students are met.
- It is a broad spectrum of how teachers and students relate together to enable teaching and learning most effectively and to realize education goals. Use of technology is only one of many approaches to make teaching and learning possible to realize individual learning attainment.

For Ministers consideration:

Ministers are invited to consider the following:

a) Short-term responses:

- To ensure continued quality educational services are available to the most at risk, marginalized children, youth and adults in emergency situations, as crisis hits the most vulnerable populations the hardest.
- To address social-emotional needs of children, youth, and adults, in coping with unprecedented physical, emotional and economic stress, to support health and well-being of all and prevent undesirable consequences such as child abuse, domestic violence, and juvenile delinquencies.
- To provide enhanced up-to-date support and reassurance to teachers and principals is fundamental in this crisis.
- To help strengthen communication and engagement between schools and parents and systematically reaching out to communities, employers and society at large, would help promote understanding and support for parents, teachers, and children and to raise awareness of increased risk of child abuse and domestic violence during pandemic.
- To explore means to make digital learning equipment as well as communication platform more accessible and affordable for schools and students.
- To collect and monitor education data and build responses based on data, to ensure that education systems address the needs specific groups and vulnerabilities.
- Governments and development partners to collectively help prioritize educational interventions forming part of national, regional, or international COVID-19 stimulus packages and relief by building strong evidence-based knowledge and advocacy.

b) Medium to Long-Term Considerations:

- To deepen the understanding of multiple factors and approaches consisting of pedagogy among the teachers and education administrators, and align curriculum, pedagogy, and education goals through policy and planning dialogue.
- To enhance capacity in education system to withstand emergencies.
- Governments and development partners to work together to minimize technological barriers for schools, teachers and learners, and to bridge the digital divide for marginalized populations.
- Strengthening the resilience of education system through pedagogical reforms and curriculum upgrading to facilitate transition from traditional learning modalities to more versatile learning platforms.

Minister's Position	
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