



**PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORK [PacREF]
JOINT OVERSIGHT MISSION (JOM)
MARCH 21-31, 2022**

AIDE MEMOIRE

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Oversight Mission (JOM) of the PacREF Programme was completed between 21st and 31st March 2022. The Mission¹, co-chaired by New Zealand MFAT and the PacREF Steering Committee interviewed the five PacREF Implementing Agencies (IAs): USP (DoE, IoE, and Pacific TAFE); SPC-EQAP, UNICEF, UNESCO and APTC; three participating countries: Tuvalu, Palau, and RMI (the Solomon Islands were unable to participate due to technical difficulties and urgent Parliamentary commitments)², and the PacREF Programme Facilitating Unit (the PFU) via Zoom.

Prior to the start of the JOM, Mission members reviewed relevant documents including the Phase 1 Implementation Rolling Plan, the 2021 PacREF Annual Implementation Review (AIR) and the draft 2021 Annual Monitoring Report (MEL Report). During the JOM the Mission's conversations with the IAs and participating countries revolved around three areas of enquiry:

- (i) programme delivery,
- (ii) the long-term direction of PacREF and sustainability, and
- (iii) programme ownership.

This Aide Memoire records the content of the Mission's discussions with IAs, countries and the PFU, and provides recommendations to be considered by the PacREF Steering Committee. Details on the status of progress towards PacREF targets and objectives, impact of Covid-19 on Programme implementation can be found in the 2021 AIR and the 2021 MEL report.

The Mission expresses its appreciation and gratitude to the IAs, and to the Pacific governments' participants for their time, thoughtfulness, cooperation, and advice.

PacREF Phase 1 – Intended Outputs and Funding

The anticipated outputs of Phase 1 of the PacREF Programme are 15 Regional Goods (tools, mechanisms, and standards) and the support services the IAs will provide to countries as they

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² Interviewees: Michelle Belisle, SPC-EQAP; Aya Aoki and Nisha, UNESCO; Anna Smeby, Gail Townsend, UNESCO; Seu'ula Johansen Fua, Rosi Lagi and Susan Sela, USP; Arthur Soakimi, APTC; Filipe Jitoko and Pretishma Singh, PacREF PFU; Panapa Tufoua and Netaki Letia, Tuvalu; Kanchi Hosia, RMI, Ray Mechol, Palau.

contextualize and embed the RGs into their education systems. The Phase 1 Programme consists of 65 IA-led activities, each designed to contribute to the process of developing, testing, and in-country contextualization of the 15 Regional Goods (RGs).

Phase 1 is directly funded by an ESPIG grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) of USD 14,997,510, a grant from MFAT of NZD 4,133,596, and by each of the IAs, who contribute from their core and/or donor financed resources. In addition, DFAT supports PacREF through its funding contributions to SPC-EQAP, USP and APTC. ADB have provided USD250,000 to help facilitate PacREF operations and oversight from a GPE Programme Development Grant (PDG).

MISSION FINDINGS

A. Programme Delivery

Key Messages

- *PacREF's policy and RGs objectives remain relevant*
- *Although Covid-19 and the late release of ESPIG funds slowed implementation the Programme was not in any way derailed*
- *IAs and countries recognize and are prepared for the long-term nature of the PacREF Programme*
- *PacREF is well integrated into IAs' business plans*
- *The IA Fono is an effective vehicle for IA collaboration and coordination. National Fonos could be just as effective at promoting the coordination of inputs into national programmes*

It is evident that the PacREF's policy objectives remain relevant and that they continue to align with national priorities, although it is recognised that it will be a gradual process to fully align 15 countries' sector plans with their PacREF objectives and commitments. It is also evident that the PacREF's participating countries recognize both the value of ensuring these synergies and contribution and value-add of PacREF's activities and the RGs that those activities will produce.

Despite delays in operationalizing PacREF due to Covid-19, IAs and countries remain optimistic about the Programme, what it can deliver, and its long-term objectives. However, they are not convinced that they can complete all RG development and contextualization within Phase 1. The Mission note that it may be more appropriate for the Programme to focus on the completion of RG development in Phase 1 and on the contextualization and embedding of the RGs in national systems in the first year or two of Phase 2.

The integration of the PacREF Programme and of PacREF targets into IA business plans appears complete.

The Mission recognised that it has been a difficult year for Programme implementation due to the impact of Covid-19 and the delays in IAs gaining access to the ESPIG funding: remote delivery takes time and is quite complicated in a Pacific context. An obvious challenge for some IAs is that their membership does not include all participating PacREF countries. They will need to ensure that as a PacREF IA they are able to reach as many Pacific countries as possible. If an IA is unable to work in and/or support all PacREF countries, then the Programme must explore how those IAs' inputs can be provided in the countries they do not reach.

IAs and countries recognize and are prepared for the long-term nature of the PacREF Programme. The countries interviewed all indicated a commitment to improving quality, to reforms that introduce bespoke Pacific solutions to their challenges, and to addressing the challenges they face as they

participate in PacREF, including Covid-19 and often overwhelmed ministry staff. However, it is apparent that countries are not fully aware of which IA and other externally assisted initiatives fall within PacREF and which do not. Similarly, there appears to be confusion at the country level about how PacREF and other externally funded programs can and should align in support of national plans and objectives.

Discussions with IAs revealed that there are unexplored opportunities for PacREF to build on their flagship programs and areas of expertise. While the value-add of these opportunities can be explored by the PFU and through what has become a very effective IA Fono, the Mission cautions stakeholders about the risks of ‘mission creep’ and stretching resources. Equally, the PacREF Programme should not be seen as broken into a series of linked projects, losing the direction and momentum it has as a highly visible, fully-joined-up regional effort. Certainly, PacREF provides space for IAs to build on their flagship programs and for partnerships to grow but continual care must be taken to remove/avoid duplication of effort and investment of scarce resources.

The JOM confirmed the growing effectiveness of the IA Fono as a means of Programme coordination and collaboration and of the value of the PFU. It is the view of the Mission that the IA Fono and the PFU should be supported to reach their potential. While there may still be issues to be resolved between IAs as the Programme progresses, the IA Fono could become the Programme’s key mechanism for ensuring the rapid dissemination of lessons and good practices while engaging as an informal regional body with development partners to explain and promote PacREF and regionalism in the education sector. The PFU is of much wider value to the Programme than simply being an office that manages programme administration and reporting. It clearly now serves as a Programme-wide convening agent and has the potential to develop and lead a much-needed comprehensive PacREF communication and information dissemination strategy.

Both the IAs and countries, though sometimes indirectly, raised the issue of in-country effectiveness. Concerns included the need for PacREF and the IAs to help facilitate the shift from multiple disconnected inputs into country systems to unified support programs – perhaps through the ongoing PFU-led programme of National Fonos. These were seen as providing space for country level conversations for unpacking PacREF and ensuring a good ‘fit’ between national priorities and PacREF and other externally financed programmes (bilateral and regional). National Fonos also provide the opportunity for the IAs and the PFU to confirm what falls within PacREF’s boundaries and what does not.

The Mission notes with some concern the number of project and programme focal points in some PacREF countries. We suggest that this is creating an unnecessary work overload for many ministry staff and may be far less an effective means of programme/project coordination/facilitation than is intended. Some consolidation of these roles within each country may prove useful.

Communication and Programme Awareness

Key messages

- *PacREF needs an effective comprehensive communication strategy (CCS) and the PFU needs to be adequately staffed and financed to deliver the CCS*

Discussions throughout the JOM revealed that PacREF is not being particularly well-communicated at three levels:

- (i) to new staff in MoEs, including to new sector leadership;

(ii) within MoEs; and

(iii) within the wider education and training community across the Pacific.

This is clearly impeding progress across the Programme and may be causing ministries to miss or underestimate the opportunities that the PacREF Programme offers. The Mission also notes that there are mixed levels of understanding in PacREF countries about the value of working together across countries and of how that working together can help to build the inputs necessary to meet their national objectives and targets.

Clearly in some countries, MoE staff are not particularly well-informed about PacREF, the PacREF Programme and of its history and of their country's involvement in its origins and design. This is troubling because it was the absence of programme knowledge within education ministries that contributed to the low success of PacREF's predecessor, the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF). The JOM reminds all stakeholders that a poorly communicated Programme and an absence of awareness among participating countries of what PacREF can and does offer will negatively (and perhaps rapidly) influence Programme effectiveness.

There is opportunity for the organizations in PacREF's governance structure to promote the PacREF's place in strengthening Pacific regionalism. This task may have been made easier through the development of the Pacific 2050 Strategy by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). This included extensive consultation across the region on the concept and development of regional goods like those being developed in the PacREF.

The Mission identified two areas in which Programme awareness could be significantly enhanced:

- (i) what PacREF is and why it is important to individual countries to assist them to meet national targets; and
- (ii) that PacREF provides an organizing framework for guiding programme strengthening, improving outcomes, and raising their returns on national and externally provided investments in their education and training systems.

The Mission recognized the potential value of the PFU taking a significant role in guiding and reinforcing Programme communication in these areas and notes their commitment to employ a Communications Specialist staff, to developing and disseminating appropriate familiarization materials including through promotional videos, and hosting PacREF webinars. It will be essential that the PFU is properly supported and adequately financed in this effort.

The Mission also recognized the value of collecting and sharing success stories to illustrate PacREF's utility, the value of regional collaboration, and of broadly socializing the PacREF "message". It will be critical to ensure that PacREF's communication strategy has clarity, captures the breadth of what is happening Programme wide, maintains a region-wide aspect, and is reflective of intra-Pacific variations and of national ministry capacity shortfalls and Programme needs (north v. south Pacific, small island states v. larger islands for example). It is expected that participating in National Fono will provide a means for the PFU to gain a better understanding of each country's level of Programme awareness.

B. Long-term Impact and Sustainability

Key messages

- *The Programme must have the scope to pivot where necessary or where pivoting will add value*
- *PacREF can serve as an organizing framework as countries embed participation in regional programmes into their national plans*
- *PacREF education ministers wish PacREF to continually strengthen SPC-EQAP and USP so that they can increasingly lend the support to countries' education and training systems – there is scope within the Programme for greater emphasis on this*

The Mission recognized the importance of the Programme being able to pivot to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. It also recognized the importance of IAs and countries to be able to seize opportunities to build and strengthen the Programme by increasing the relevance and utility of the RGs and their associated activities.

On this point, the Mission identified six areas that could influence the long-term impact of the Programme and the utility of the RGs:

- (i) consistently ensuring that the Programme is building on both IAs' and countries' programme strengths;
- (ii) ensuring that the Programme harnesses what already exists in the Pacific and primarily seeks Pacific solutions for Pacific problems (and thus builds resilience);
- (iii) ensuring that activities are always relevant to and supporting of Pacific cultures and helping to grow regionalism;
- (iv) supporting Programme flexibility and supporting IAs and countries as they exercise that flexibility;
- (v) ensuring and articulating complementarity with national goals and investments; and
- (vi) encouraging the use of PacREF as an organizing framework within national educational policy and planning process, as well as it being a beneficial delivery Programme.

Further, the Mission notes the need to establish strong and reliable ways to collaborate both on multiple planning processes and to develop and to continually strengthen national planning capacities. It is understood that EQAP has developed an appropriate model of joint planning at the country level that involves DFAT, MFAT and UNICEF. It should be possible for PacREF to learn from this model and to disseminate or adapt it through working with USP-IoE's policy and planning programmes. This would develop further ways to strengthen in-country planning capacity both as part of formal IoE courses and on-the-job.

Capacity strengthening at the two regionally owned organizations (USP and SPC-EQAP) over the life of PacREF (2019-2030) is recognized by the Mission as an essential Programme outcome. The Mission suggests that this goal be reinforced and that, where feasible, resources be aggressively guided towards meeting that objective. The mission also suggests that both UNICEF and UNESCO explore means through which their core funding can support their staffing and capacity strengthening needs to support PacREF programme delivery during Phase 2.

The Mission recognised the need to gain region-wide efficiencies in service delivery and to look towards Phase 2 as a vehicle to consolidate processes that can bring about meaningful regionalism within the sector. And, in doing so, it suggests that the PFU begin to examine how best to shape Phase 2 as a period in which PacREF can become the organizing structure/framework for all multi-country.

C. Ownership

Key messages:

- raising awareness of what PacREF does and can offer to countries;
- seeking and amplifying country voices in all aspects of PacREF organizing and oversight activity;
- identifying where PacREF activities best support national priorities and ensuring the relevance for countries participating in PacREF programme activities and of PacREF products (the RGs);
- supporting the integration of PacREF into national plans;
- providing a space where countries can see/access all that is going on within PacREF; and,
- raising the visibility of PacREF within CPEM and PHES. On this latter point, the Mission suggests a realignment of the annual PHES meeting to be a gathering that prioritizes discussion of a broad swathe of regional programs/issues/opportunities/reporting (all of which can eventually be captured under a PacREF banner)

Emerging Practices

Key Message

- *New practices are emerging that can improve Programme outcomes*

The Mission is pleased to note several emerging practices that all have the capacity to improve Programme outcomes. These include:

- (i) the flexible access to and use of Programme funds to allow resources to be maximised under difficult conditions;
- (ii) IAs assisting countries to embed the Programme in their national plans;
- (iii) IAs planning the core of their programme to reflect their understanding of how it can influence PacREF outcomes over the short, medium and longer term and;
- (iv) the model of support that APTC offers – drawing into the PacREF Programme a development partner-funded initiative that is targeted at region wide or multi-country outcomes. This may provide lessons for how other partners could support the delivery of PacREF outcomes.

PacREF's Mid-Term Review (MTR)

The Mission recognises the need to schedule a PacREF Phase 1 MTR and suggests that the review be completed so that its report may also serve as the first full ESPIG progress report that is due on 15 December 2022. The Mission suggests that, based on the JOM's findings and on GPE's reporting requirements, the MTR ToR requires:

- (i) an update on Programme accomplishments and tangible outputs produced prior to September 30, 2022;
- (ii) a review of outstanding challenges and delays;
- (iii) a summary of emerging lessons and promising practices;
- (iv) the sharing of success stories and impacts to demonstrate the value of PacREF;
- (v) a review of preferred options for the regular review of the PacREF policies;
- (vi) sex disaggregated data, as well as data on children with disabilities in education (a GPE requirement)

- (vii) a brief review of how PacREF can maximize the regional education architecture to improve quality of service delivery;
- (viii) a brief review of the effectiveness of the PacREF governance structure;
- (ix) a discussion of the timing of Phase 2 and of any need to seek a no cost extension of the ESPIG;
- (x) a discussion of how PacREF can ensure the correct attribution of effective processes, new skills, tools, etc.;
- (xi) a discussion of any need to reprioritize activities and/or RGs prior to the start of the 2023 Programme year and
- (xii) an update of risks associated with Programme delivery.

Recommendations

1. (i) That by April 25th the Terms of Reference of the PFU be redrafted and approved by the SC to ensure that the unit can provide a higher level of professional support to the Programme, including in improving Programme wide communications and awareness, and

(ii) that the PFU be staffed at a level adequate to ensure that it can fully meet the revised ToR. Attachment 1 includes a draft revised PFU ToR.
2. That by July 1 the SC receive and approve a ToR for the PacREF Phase 1 MTR.
3. That the SC approve the PFU organizing four small research activities each to be completed by November 1 2022:
 - (i) a brief examination of the financing of Pacific Education;
 - (ii) an examination of the potential for technology to improve delivery of the PacREF Programme;
 - (iii) an examination of how best PacREF can assess regional and national progress in improving equity, learning outcomes and efficiency that can be attributed (wholly or in part) to PacREF;
 - (iv) a review of existing and potential country-to-country learning opportunities.
4. That the SC request the IAs and PFU to explore in what timeframe the Programme can best complete RG development and the contextualization and embedding of the RGS in national systems and to begin to reschedule activities based on that assessment. This will inform a decision around whether to seek a no-cost extension from GPE.
5. That the SC explore, through the PFU, how PacREF can best ensure that all PacREF countries have timely access to RGs as they are developed even though some of the IAs may not be working in all PacREF countries.
6. That the SC explore the possibility of realigning the annual PHES meeting to become a high-level gathering that prioritizes discussion of a broad sway of regional programs issues/opportunities/reporting (all of which can eventually be captured under a PacREF banner) rather than being more-or-less aligned to the agenda of a single agency.

Attachment

PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

PacREF Facilitating Unit

Summary Terms of Reference

Revised DRAFT

Introduction

The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) is a ministerial policy document that guides the development of regional education interventions to support national education systems in the Pacific achieve their national and global education goals and commitments. The PacREF programme is a schedule of activities to be completed in three phases over a 12-year period, that are designed to meet this objective. Reinforcing their commitment to regionalism, the Ministers, at the Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEEdMM) in 2018 endorsed the PacREF programme and delegated the oversight for its implementation to the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES).

The PacREF promotes fully inclusive learning opportunities. It will assist Pacific Island Forum member states to operationalize their commitments to raise the quality of education, to enhance the education outcomes of learners and to produce high quality graduates able to contribute economically and socially to their communities. It recognises the performance challenges that Pacific education systems face and through the PacREF programme will develop an integrated set of Regional Goods (RGs – tools, mechanisms, and standards) that are designed to help Pacific countries address these challenges. The PacREF also supports the strengthening of two regionally owned education agencies, SPC-EQAP and USP's IoE and Education Discipline, and country to country cooperation. It is supported by a robust monitoring system that assists countries to track programme progress and performance trends against national, regional, and international indicators.

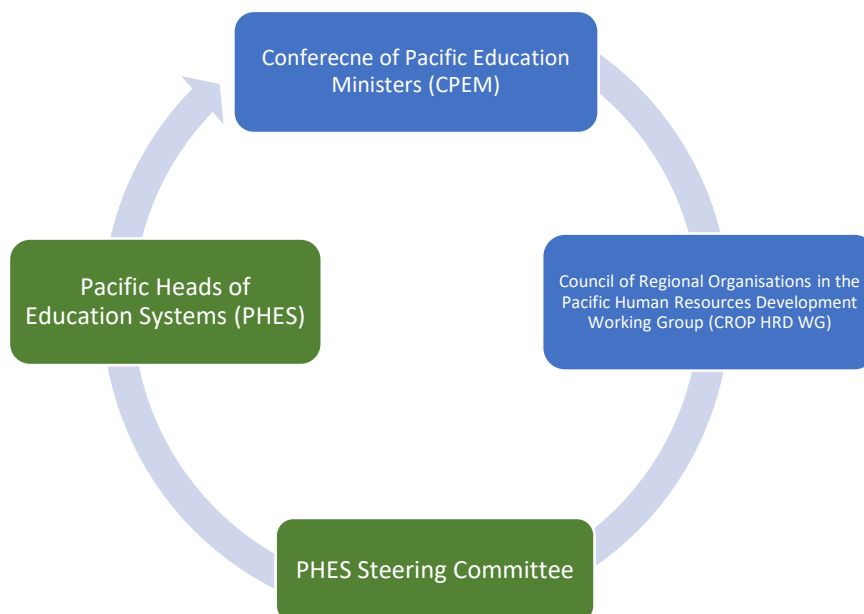
Phase 1 of the Programme was developed by Pacific countries supported by the IAs and a group of development partners that included ADB, MFAT, DFAT and GPE, and its implementation is led by five regional agencies (IAs) namely; APTC, SPC-EQAP, UNESCO, UNICEF, and USP (Institute of Education [IoE], Pacific Technical and Further Education [PTAFE] and the SPACE-Education Discipline). Phase 1 consists of:

- (i) 65 activities that will contribute to the development, testing, and the in-country contextualization of 15 RGs in four policy areas:
 - a. quality and relevance;
 - b. learning pathways;
 - c. student outcomes and wellbeing; and
 - d. teacher profession, and
- (ii) the IA-led support services to ensure that those 15 RGs are successfully contextualized to and embedded in those Pacific education systems that request them.

A Phase 1 Implementation Rolling Plan (IRP) details those 65 activities, the countries which plan to participate in each, and the schedule on which they are intended to be completed.

Phase 1 is directly funded by an ESPIG (grant) from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) of USD 14,997,510, a grant from MFAT of NZD 4,133,596, and by each of the IAs, who contributed from their core and/or donor financed resources. In addition, DFAT supports PacREF through its funding contributions to SPC-EQAP, USP and APTC. ADB have provided USD250,000 to help facilitate PacREF operations and oversight.

The PacREF Governance Structure



The Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM), a ministerial forum, provides oversight to the whole of the PacREF programme, setting its policy directions and priorities. The Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) and its Steering Committee (SC) implements decisions made by CPEM supported by the IAs and Development Partners (DPs) through the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific Human Resource Development Working Group (CROP HRD WG).

The PacREF Facilitating Unit

The PacREF Facilitating Unit (PFU) is a full-time entity that is responsible to facilitate PacREF programme operations of the IAs. It is located under the Office of the Vice Chancellor and President (VCP), USP. It also serves as the Secretariat to the CROP HRD WG. Although housed within USP, in line with PHES requirements, the PFU will operate wholly independently of USP as an IA.

PFU Phase 1 Responsibilities

- To assist the IAs in the coordination of PacREF programme activities.
- To help ensure that partnerships between IAs and between IAs and countries are effective.
- To manage all aspects of the logistics of PacREF programmes financed country-to-country cooperation and learning activities (noting (i) that country-to-country cooperation and learning opportunities will be identified by countries and by IAs and that each will require SC approval, and (ii) that these activities are not listed in the IRP).
- To ensure that all Forum member countries have full access to the PacREF programme.
- To design a comprehensive PacREF Communications Strategy for approval of the SC.
- To implement the PacREF Communications Strategy, and to working with IAs, countries, and other PacREF stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the Strategy – this is expected to include the design and maintenance of a comprehensive PacREF website.
- To collaborate with EQAP on the monitoring and evaluation of the PacREF programme.
- To informally monitor activity progress towards achieving the RGs and to liaise with EQAP and other IAs and countries on issues of concern.

- To draft a brief PacREF Annual Implementation Report for the CPEM (due in January of each year).
- To ensure the timely annual collection and verification of the domestic financing commitments of the six GPE countries for submission to GPE as part of the Annual ESPIG Report (the first is due in mid-December 2022).
- To support a Mid-term Review of the Phase 1 Programme in mid-late 2022 – MTR ToR to be submitted to the SC for approval by June 30, 2022.
- To support an independent review of the Phase 1 Programme within its final six month – the ToR for this activity to be submitted to the SC for approval by 45 days before the activity is due to start.
- To ensure the timely submission of those reviews to the SC through the CROP HRD WG for their review prior to their submission to the PHES and then to other stakeholders.
- To support stakeholders in the design process for Phase 2 of the Programme.
- To convene the CPEM in consultation with the host country.
- To liaise with and support the ESPIG Grant Agent (ADB) and Coordinating Agency (NZ MFAT) on all aspects of the Phase 1 Programme and its funding and oversight.

PFU Staffing

The PFU currently have four full-time staff all under USP contracts. They are:

- The Coordinator – PFU
- The Finance Manager
- The Administrative Officer
- The Communication Specialist (recruitment under way)

A fifth position, an Education Specialist, will be negotiated with ADB for funding.

In addition, the Coordinator will have access to:

- (i) a limited number of person-months of consultant technical assistance that can be drawn down with ADB and SC approval (the number of months of short-term TA available to the PFU per year remains to be determined), and
- (ii) limited short-term international specialist TA hired and financed by the ADB.

Staff and Operational Costs

Staff and operational costs will be met from existing commitments from the PacREF's financing partners.

Reporting

The PFU will provide an Annual PFU Progress Report against this ToR to the SC, the ADB and NZ MFAT at the end of each Programme year. The first report will be due on Decembwer31 2022.