



INAUGURAL CONFERENCE OF PACIFIC EDUCATION MINISTERS

Aotea Centre, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

20-22 March 2023

Mid Term Review of the PacREF Programme

(PacREF(23) CPEM.03)

(Paper prepared by the Independent Review Team - Asian Development Bank)

Topic	<i>Mid Term Review of the PacREF programme</i>
Paper Collaboration	<i>Independent Review Team - funded by the Asian Development Bank</i>
Purpose of the Brief	To present the main recommendations of the independent mid-term review of the PacREF Programme to the region's education ministers

Background

- The purpose of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) was to provide guidance to the Pacific Education Ministers, key stakeholders, and the region's development Partners (DPs) on the future directions of the PacREF Programme.
- The MTR assessed:
 - the Programme's progress towards meeting its output and outcome objectives,
 - how the intended Phase 1 Programme was progressing against Implementation Rolling Plan (IRP), and
 - how well the Program was aligning with ongoing and emerging country education programs.
- The report also informed PacREF's Progress Report to GPE.

Consultations

- The MTR engaged extensively with stakeholders through face-to-face meetings across 8 countries: with visits to Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Kiribati and Tonga, and through virtual meetings 'with RMI, FSM and Palau. Discussions were structured around the core elements of the MTR's expected outcomes:
- The MTR canvassed feedback from all PacREF's DP's, ministries of education, Implementing Agencies (IA's), PacREF governance groups, church based and independent education associations, other donor and aid agencies, relevant non-government organizations, education and training organizations, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and PacREF Facilitating Unit (PFU).

The MTR Report

The Report

- framed the Programme within the Forum Leader's vision and commitment to "*ensure the health and wellbeing of our people and to human rights and equity for all*" as articulated in **Blue Pacific 2050**,
- focussed on a broad range of programme elements reflecting PacREF's overall progress towards meeting the expectations of participating countries as defined in the **PacREF Strategic Policy 2018-2030** document,
- included an assessment of how the **six policy principles** have been translated and applied in practice by key stakeholders and an assessment of Phase 1 progress against the its Results Framework, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) results framework, and
- investigated continuous quality improvement and aid effectiveness options as well as a justification for a 14-month extension, and
- informed PacREF's Progress Report to GPE.

The MTR has provided a relatively small number of prioritized and affordable recommendations that are actionable over the short to medium term and which will not have a negative impact on Implementing Agencies. They focus mainly on program sustainability and long-term success achieved through 'continuous program improvement'.

All 16 MTR recommendations and the PacREF Programme's response to each are attached to this brief.

MTR Findings

The MTR placed a **focus on improving current practice, process and arrangements**, rather than recommending fundamental change.

The key findings (not in a prioritised order):

- The Programme is **working better than expected**, given COVID and other constraints.
- The Programme provides an efficient model and processes for the development and delivery of regional goods and services across each of the PacREF policy areas.
- There is consensus that the PacREF policy areas were a strength of the program and are still highly relevant to the needs of individual countries who were very positive about progress to date and optimistic that future gains would be made.
- Importantly, PacREF gives countries a mechanism and support for learning from each other, to achieve economies of scale in RG implementation costs and to take an active role in the development of a regional approach to the continuous quality improvement of educational systems in the Pacific.
- There is a need to look further at program leadership and ‘ownership’. Some minor changes will improve the program’s governance and structure.
- On-going risk management a high priority to mitigate risks to long-term programme sustainability and viability building on the programme’s many strengths and outcomes.
- A 14-month extension will be beneficial to the Programme.
- There was clear feedback supporting the current role, function, and operations of the PFU.
- A strength of the program is the leadership and initiative taken by the IAs to drive the development of the RGs and activities often in the face of funding delays and capacity constraints.
- There was universal support for the objective to embed PacREF in national systems planning and that member states must assume ownership of the process.
- Effective communication was identified as a watershed issue for program sustainability with many factors contributing to the general criticism of current communication systems and significant gaps in awareness of PacREF in the public domain.
- There is a strong case supporting the notion of co-funding rather than a total reliance on PacREF, similarly a look at options for more flexible planning around RG’s and support services.
- An analysis of the extent to which each of the 6 countries who ‘elected’ to participate in RGs and activities, benefited from the pooled GPE funding model, felt the 6 countries were receiving significant benefit from the current funding model.

Ministers are invited to:

Note the MTR’s recommendations and the schedule for their implementation

Decision requested:

Ministers are invited to:

- (i) consider the main recommendations of the review; and*
- (ii) approve the proposed responses to the recommendations*

Ministers’ Positio

Ministers **approved** the proposed responses to the recommendations.

Attachment

<p>Recommendation 1: PacREF Policy Improvement</p> <p>1.1 PacREF Leadership: That the status quo be maintained in terms of PacREF remaining under the support and guidance of the CROP HRD WG through the USP VCP. <i>Response:</i> PFU will increase awareness among stakeholders of the support provided to PFU by USP and ensure that as hosting arrangements are continually strengthened USP are made aware, in advance, of any increase in levels of support required. <i>When:</i> 2nd quarter of 2023 – with updates annually.</p>
<p>Rec. 1.2 That the Concept of PacREF ‘Ownership’ is clarified. <i>Response:</i> PFU will lead a workshop for communications officers and country based PacREF focal points that will confirm all aspects of PacREF roles and responsibilities and introduce communications strategies for national and regional levels. <i>When:</i> Workshop to be scheduled during the 2nd quarter of 2023. The workshop will be scheduled as an annual event.</p>
<p>Rec. 1.3 That PacREF’s Policy Documents be updated. <i>Response:</i> The IAs will revise the Implementation Revolving Plan (IRP) and present it to PHES by mid-2023. National systems will have the opportunity to begin development of national PacREF policy statements via an online workshop in the 2nd quarter of 2023. <i>When:</i> 2nd quarter of 2023</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Proposed Phase 1 Extension - that the GA (ADB) request GPE to agree to a 1.5-year extension of the ESPIG grant period beyond the current period which is due to expire in May 2024. <i>Response:</i> PFU/ADB will seek PHES and CPEM approval for the extension. A short paper will be presented to PHES and to CPEM. PFU will action approval by PHES and CPEM. <i>When:</i> 2nd quarter of 2023</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Planning for Skills/TVET and APTC engagement beyond Phase 1 - that a skills/TVET component be considered for inclusion late in Phase 1 or in Phase 2. <i>Response:</i> PFU and APTC will respond if requested by PHES or CPEM - noting that the PacREF Programme agenda (for Phase 1 or later) is determined by CPEM (based on advice from their PHES) – any subsequent action should wait for the Programme and priorities review at PHES and/or CPEM. Note: The ability of IAs to respond to any new priorities must be verified. <i>When:</i> To be determined by the PHES and the CPEM.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: PACREF and Bilateral Education Projects - that a briefing paper be prepared for CPEM that articulates the significant benefits to closer alignment between the PacREF and donor funded bilateral education programs. <i>Response:</i> PFU will prepare a first draft of a brief for the PacREF SC and the GA and CA to review. Draft will outline opportunities and constraints and will draw initial input from countries, DFAT, MFAT, UNICEF, and UNESCO. <i>When:</i> 2nd quarter of 2023</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: Governance - that the PFU undertake a review of the terms of reference and modus-operandi of all PacREF governance groups. <i>Response:</i> PFU will clarify stakeholder roles and responsibilities and disseminate that document widely (see rec. 1.2 above). First, though, the PFU will determine the CPEM’s commitment to the current governance structure. Second, it will develop a ToR for the roles and responsibilities review for</p>

SC approval, and the review will be completed in the 2nd quarter of 2023. Third, on completion of the review the PFU will circulate an electronic PacREF Roles and Responsibility pamphlet by mid-year (in line with rec. 1.2) and share it with all stakeholders as part of its public relations and communication strategy.

When: Over the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters of 2023.

Recommendation 6: IA and National Fonos - that the formal role of the IA Fono and National Fonos be reviewed to investigate how they can be used more effectively, as a collective of key players, and to leverage off other donor programs.

Response: A brief will be prepared by the PFU and the IAs to articulate Fono options and make recommendations for the SC to review. The brief will recognize that the IA Fono is an ad hoc forum for the IAs and not a formal structure and it will consider existing structures in-country and both IA and country-specific preferences.

When: 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2023

Recommendation 7: Communities of Practice - that a proposal for Communities of Practice (CoP) to be established to support the design, development and implementation of RGs/activities be considered by the SC.

Response: No action at this point. However, PFU will test any demand for and merits of CoPs within PacREF as we move towards scoping the next phase of the Programme. A brief to test merits of recommendation may be prepared in late 2023 as Phase 1. Our caution about moving on this recommendation at this time is based on fact that regional and country consultations and input from IAs appear to be working well enough at this point.

Recommendation 8: Improving Programme Facilitation

8.1 Assuming that PFU remains at USP, that there should be a plan of action to consolidate and better define PFU's place within USP while remaining at arm's length to it.

Response: The PHES and/or the CPEM to confirm agreement with or to identify issues over PFU's location in and its independence of USP. Aligning with responses to recommendations 1.2 and 5, the PFU will inform all stakeholders of what USP is contributing either for a fee or free of charge.

Where weaknesses exist in USP support the PHES or the CPEM can request USP to address those shortfalls.

When: 2nd quarter of 2023. With follow up at each PHES meeting – assuming PacREF PHES meetings will take place annually.

8.2 That PFU becomes a Legal Entity.

Response: No action at this point. To be revisited as a possibility at the end of Phase 1 if GA, CA, and DPs indicate that is a preferred action. Although it is recognised that this may be a very long action that requires legal advice and consultations with stakeholders.

When: To be revisited in 3rd quarter of 2024. At that point there could be a feasibility study based on some models already existing particularly in the Asia-Pacific region as benefits are not immediately clear.

8.3 That the PFU's Terms of Reference be revisited to ensure that PFU can fully respond to Programme needs.

Response: PFU's ToR will be revisited and discussed with key stakeholders. Any recommended changes (including staffing needs – see 8.4 below) will be forwarded to the SC for clearance.

When: 2nd quarter of 2023.

8.4 That a Functional Analysis of the PFU's Work be undertaken in parallel with the work being recommended throughout recommendation 8.
Response: No action at this point. A formal Functional Analysis will not be completed unless requested by the SC, PHES or CPEM once the next Phase of the programme is determined. However, extra care will be taken to ensure that the PFU's ToR, Workplan and staffing needs are evidence.

8.5 That PFU's branding and marketing be strengthened.
Response: PFU's communication specialists and IA representatives will explore this recommendation and adjust as necessary.
When: 2nd quarter of 2023

Recommendation 9: Planning Improvements

9.1 That a review of the Implementation Rolling Plan be undertaken. The PFU to prepare a three-part briefing a paper for the attention of a future meeting of the PHES SC recommending:

1. A proposal to move from a 3 x 4-year Phased program to a 12 x 1-year planning model for RGs and activities. The rationale for this change is in part provided in the recommendation for a Phase 1 extension (7.2).
2. A process to review the current IRP activities and a subsequent approval process for proposed changes.
3. For proposed RG/activity changes to the IRP for the remainder of Phase 1, a co-design and development model be considered which builds on the current collaborative strength of the partners and agencies yet reflects a model where the responsibility of implementation is jointly the responsibility of IAs and participating countries and helps to build their capacity to do so.

The SC should also consider this model as the approach to PacREF IRP development in the lead up to Phase 2.

Response: A brief will be prepared that argues for a 2-year rolling plan and more formal 1-year plans and budgets. Adopting this approach is expected to help keep the Programme dynamic and responsive. It will also provide the means for PacREF to be more responsive to emerging national and regional needs and/or bilateral programs. A transition is expected to begin in late 2023 and be effective in 2024. Lessons identified in the MTR and elsewhere will be incorporated. Actions would need EQAP support as they lead rolling plan development. Results Framework and other documents will be updated by in 2023. It is expected that national work plans and better alignment with each country's agenda will be promoted by PHES and CPEM in March. (This aligns with other recommendations.)

When: 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2023

9.2 That key PacREF Documents be update regularly.

Response: PFU to work with IAs on revisions to IRP and ME&L Framework.

When: 2nd quarter f 2023

9.3 The countries develop National PacREF Work Plans

Response: This will be discussed with National Focal Points at their upcoming workshop and, if supported, a proposal will be developed by PFU for PHES approval.

When: 2nd quarter of 2023

9.4 That legal ownership of the Intellectual Property (IP) is clarified.

Response: The PFU will work with the IAs and the DPs to explore the issues raised in the recommendation. Appropriate steps will be determined, and the SC informed of any necessary actions.

When: 2nd and/or 3rd quarter of 2023

Recommendation 10: Role and Function of IAs - that in the immediate future there be no change to the current role and function of the IAs and their performance contracts with the ADB.

Response: No action unless Phase 1 priorities change. IAs to act only if PHES and/or CPEM determine there are changes to Programme priorities in Phase 1 that alter the current roles and functions of the IAs.

Recommendation 11: PACREF and National Education Systems

11.1 That countries embed PacREF into their National Education Systems.

11.2 That countries under direction from the PHES, if they have not already done so, develop a national PacREF Work Plan.

11.3 That countries develop a National (Country) PacREF Policy Statement.

Response: PFU will work with the PHES to develop a plan that combines these three sub-recommendations into one set of PacREF ‘preferred’ actions at the national level. Guidelines will then be developed to subsequently be endorsed by the SC. In progressing this activity, the PFU recognize that countries may want to limit any extra work that ‘compliance’ may require - unless there is a credible incentive involved. An initial step will be discussing this recommendation at the PFU’s country focal points workshop in the 2nd quarter of 2023. A small working group could begin this shortly after the CPEM and a draft “Guidelines for Countries Participating in PacREF” could be shared with the SC later in the year and progressed through the subsequent PHES meeting for approval.

When: 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters of 2023

Recommendation 12: PacREF Communication Strategy - that a proposal for a comprehensive communication and PR strategy be put on the agenda for the PHES meeting in January 2023 and if deemed appropriate, be put to the CPEM conference for discussion and possible action. The elements of the strategy are: (i) Mid-Term Review Communication Strategy, (ii) Country Communication Strategy, (iii) Program Communication Strategy, and (iv) Communication Toolbox. This recommendation acknowledges that it is a ministry’s responsibility to ensure knowledge and awareness continuity of the PacREF program internally.

Response: PFU will guide work on this recommendation and work with the IAs and SC to develop a programme to identify and significantly improve the full range of PacREF communications. A communication workshop is planned for late in the 2nd quarter of 2023 at which this recommendation will be discussed with countries.

When: 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2023

Recommendation 13: Theory of Change - that the MTR’s feedback on the Theory of Change (ToC) is provided as a note for advice to the implementing agencies.

Response: PacREF’s ToC will be revisited when the Results Framework is updated.

When: 2nd quarter of 2023

Recommendation 14: Improve MEL programme approaches - that action be taken to improve approaches to the Program’s MEL system with a specific focus on learning and program improvement and sustainability.

Results Framework: The findings and learning from the analysis of the PacREF results framework be provided by the PFU to PHES for consideration and where appropriate, for advice to CPEM. It is expected the PHES/CPEM will then advise follow up action as appropriate.

Clarifying the MEL Process: The PFU work with EQAP and the IAs to provide clarity around the MEL process with specific reference to the individual and where applicable, the shared responsibilities for MEL reporting, and to whom, resides. It is suggested this be communicated to all stakeholders.

Utilization of Program Learning: There should be more attention paid to the “learning domain” of the MEL process and that the SC discuss options that would enable the learning to influence changes in management or operational behaviours and focus on PacREF’s continuous quality improvement. The MEL process should glean information and data to underpin learning from risk assessments, from the outcomes of all governance and advisory (Fono etc.) and the formal MEL process.

Response: *The Results Framework will be reviewed. At that time all PacREF MEL processes (including the learning programme) will be comprehensively examined. The activity will have two clear objectives: (i) to provide a clear articulation of purpose, responsibilities, events, schedules, and reporting structures, and (ii) to put in place a MEL focus on the regular quarterly mapping of progress on the RGs and reporting on this to the PHES. EQAP will lead action on this recommendation.*

When: *2nd, 3rd and 4th quarter of 2023 then on a regular quarterly schedule*

Recommendation 15: Risk Mitigation - that risk management and mitigation be an agenda items for the SC (for detailed and operational risks) and the PHES (for strategic risk management).

Response: *IA Fono to discuss the risk register and any required mitigation strategies and update after the CPEM. Issues to be brought to the attention of the SC and wider PHES as they are discovered. The active use of a traffic light system is an option. EQAP and the PFU lead action on this recommendation as a team.*

When: *2nd quarter of 2023*

Recommendation 16: Programme Sustainability - that the findings regarding Sustainability and Aid Effectiveness, per information and data at MTR **Annex 10**, are used to provide the relevant information, input, and commentary to inform the annual program reports to GPE, PHES and ADB.

Response: *PFU will progress this recommendation in its entirety. PFU to lead action on this recommendation.*

When: *2nd and 3rd quarter of 2023*