



PACIFIC HEADS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

TOKATOKA RESORT, NADI, FIJI

AUGUST 7-8, 2023

SPECIAL MEETING TO CONSIDER PACREF MATTERS [*CHRDWG_03_02_23*]

The Pacific Heads of Education Systems Steering Committee (PHES SC) gathered over two days to discuss key issues related to the implementation of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF). Members of the PHES SC acknowledged the efforts of the University of the South Pacific through the PacREF Facilitating Unit (PFU) in hosting the meeting. The SC members were joined by Tonga and Republic of the Marshall Islands as GPE countries contributing their GPE allocations to fund Phase 1 of PacREF. This brought the number of GPE contributing countries at the meeting to six.

Members of the PHES SC were particularly pleased to receive updates and progress reports from the PFU and Implementing Agencies (IAs) relating to the PacREF. These reports included the status of Phase 1 implementation; monitoring and evaluation; IA status reports on their activities; and the status of funding disbursement by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The PHES SC also discussed matters related to the funding of the Programme by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). Included in this discussion were the GPE member countries who contributed their GPE allocations towards funding of the Phase 1 of the PacREF Implementation Rolling Plan (IRP). These discussions resulted in the approvals required for the application to application for a no-cost extension of the current ESPIG funds from GPE, and agreements on the Regional Priority Reform and on priorities for the utilizing the regional Systems Capacity Grant (SCG) and on an approach towards securing a regional Systems Transformation Grant (STG) from GPE

A variety of partners including the PacREF IAs, development partners and donors were part of the discussions. The context for the SC meeting was provided by a status report provided by the PFU and status reports provided by the IAs. SC members through their discussions highlighted national issues that required further attention. They also deliberated and provided guidance towards priorities for a Phase 2 of the PacREF Programme.

The SC members agreed that the PFU and PacREF IAs should consider the significant concerns that were raised during the meeting and that will need to be addressed collectively and through their national systems with support from donors and development partners

The key issues identified and agreed are:

PacREF Implementation:

The PHES SC noted with appreciation the presentations by PFU and the IAs on progress made to date in the implementation of the Programme's Phase 1 IRP. They appreciated the commitment of the IAs towards implementing the PacREF programme despite some teething problems including the impact of Covid-19. Clarifications were sought on certain issues presented which were responded to by the IAs.

- ***Alignment of national, regional and global education initiatives:*** The SC agreed on the need for better alignment between PacREF and national education sector plans. This would include a mapping between national, regional and global initiatives. It was agreed that the country focal point workshop that would follow the SC meeting would look closely at alignment issues.
- ***Influence of political changes:*** The SC raised the issue of changes to education policies and programmes due to political changes, and asked for consideration of how education programmes and policies could be made more resilient to political influence.
- ***South-South Cooperation:*** The SC agreed to consider areas for south-south cooperation to be facilitated by PFU and the IAs.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

EQAP presented on the MEL Framework and processes. They informed the SC that a new online monitoring system has been developed and to be used for the next six-monthly assessment of the IRP implementation.

- ***Training of national monitoring officers:*** The SC suggested that the training of staff in-country in monitoring of PacREF should be a priority capacity building activity and asked that PFU and EQAP consider this training programme as part of MEL programme

ADB presentation

The SC was informed by ADB that the funding arrangement between UNICEF and ADB is close to being finalized and will shortly be signed by ADB, at which point funds will be disbursed to UNICEF.

ADB reiterated its support towards the PacREF programme and to PFU.

A request from the SC to map GPE GAs across the region will be followed up by PFU.

Extension of the ESPIG:

PFU presented a proposal for the no-cost extension of the current GPE ESPIG for an additional eight months to 31 December 2024. Following discussions, the SC and GPE contributing countries agreed to provide a formal sign-off on their approval in order to meet GPE's requirements.

The notion of establishing a Pacific sub-region of GPE as part of the Asia Pacific Region was raised for possible consideration. PFU will explore this option with GPE.

The GPE SCG:

The presentation by PFU on the proposed use of the regional SCG to strengthen capacity building at the regional level was welcomed by the SC who agreed that it was appropriate for the PacREF to follow the guidance provided by CPEM and to prioritise a single region-wide reform:

Focusing national education policies, plans and financing on education that reflects Pacific values, cultures, traditional knowledge, and skills.

Closed meeting

The SC held a closed session to discuss priorities for the second phase of the PacREF programme. In their discussions during the closed session, they decided on the following:

- (i) To continue to maintain the current four Policy Areas and the 16 Regional Goods being developed under Phase 1 of the Programme.
- (ii) Consider merging the following topics into the current Policy Areas:
 - a. ***Pacific Cultures***: PacREF to support modalities to embed culture and traditions into school curriculum, emphasizing the value and importance of using Pacific indigenous languages in early learning, the role of communities in teaching culture and traditions, and education as a mechanism for revitalising traditional knowledge and skills.
 - b. ***Access to Robust Data for Policy and Planning***: PacREF to support the introduction of the Pacific School Management Information System (PacSIMS) and support the use of modern technologies to empower local educators, policymakers, and communities, enabling them to make informed decisions to unlock the full potential of their education systems.
 - c. ***Developing Better Policies***: PacREF to strengthen IoE's technical capability in planning and financing, and to develop a regional hub in IoE from which ministries could access high-quality support for education policy, planning and budgeting advice and in-country support,
 - d. ***Bringing the parts together***: PacREF to support a series of regional workshops and a regional policy and planning fono designed to strengthen sector policy and planning to develop acceptable and achievable sector agendas associated with, in the first instance, strengthening Pacific culture in Pacific schools.

- (iii) In respect to emerging issues, the SC requested the development of regional goods in the following areas:
 - a. Climate Change and Resilience/Blue Ocean
 - b. Labour mobility and its impact on education in the Pacific.
- (iv) That PacREF should consider strategies to mitigate the challenges posed by remoteness and vast spread of islands.
- (v) That PacREF visibility be increased, particularly in regard to the products and benefits that PacREF provides.

Strengthening the PFU:

- The PFU presented a proposal to strengthen the PFU in three areas:
 - Advising on PacREF Programme content
 - Outcomes monitoring
 - Programme planning and sector financing

To help address the above needs, the SC endorsed the establishment of the following three positions at the PFU:

- (i) *Pacific Cultures in Education Specialist* to:
 - support the Program's increased emphasis on mainstreaming Pacific Cultures
 - liaise with countries as they develop cultural programs
- (ii) *An Outcomes Monitoring Specialist* to:
 - track RG adaptation/adoption
 - assess the RGs "fitness" for purpose and ongoing utility
- (iii) *An Education Planning and Sector Finance Specialist* to:
 - assist in Program planning, scheduling, and coordination
 - track, in detail, domestic financing to the education sector across PacREF countries.

All three positions would be required to support the work of the IAs as they in turn work with countries to ensure both the quality and timeliness of PacREF activities and RGs.

END