

13. CROP/UN Working Group on Sustainable Development

Drafted by SDWG

Summary

The size, isolation, and vast area covered by the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) raise specific issues for education regarding access and equity, quality, and efficiency. The *2012 Pacific MDGs Tracking Report* shows mixed progress on education goals and targets, and much remains to be done. The most significant issue facing the region concerns accessibility of quality education in all islands. Other pressing issues include need for increased enrolment, improved retention rates, more opportunities for students with disabilities and an expanded TVET range with direct correlation with employment opportunities.

Improving the quality of education in Pacific schools will require increasing numbers of qualified teachers and instructors, which would help foster continued increases in literacy and numeracy. Preparing children for school through Early Childhood Care and Education is also a critical investment. Efficiency and effectiveness of education could be also improved by improved sector planning, development of more local and Pacific relevant resources, and improving educational facilities. Continuing political commitment to support quality education has created an enabling policy framework, but increased resources to achieve equity in the access to quality education are still needed.

Particular attention needs to be given to Education to Sustainable Development (ESD) to ensure that the natural resources of the Pacific are sustainably managed in the context of natural hazards and climate change.

Key issues

As in other SIDS, PICs are beleaguered with issues of smallness, remoteness and scatteredness and facing various issues and challenges as follows:

Access and equity

- All the PICs are experiencing access challenges of some sort. In Kiribati, RMI, PNG and Vanuatu the net enrolment ratios of primary education are less than 90%. In these countries together with Cook Islands, FSM, Samoa and Solomon Islands many children enrolled are dropping out before completing primary school. All PICs also have access challenges in the ECCE and secondary sub-sectors, particularly for children in remote areas and from poor families.
- All PICs, except for the three northern countries, have major gaps in providing access for children and youth with disabilities. The provision of primary schooling remains a particular challenge for remote, rural communities where the higher costs are entailed in providing schooling for smaller numbers of students. Although gender parity has been achieved for primary education in most PICs, gender gaps remain in PNG and Solomon Islands.
- Despite significant investment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in the region, TVET options are limited and are not always relevant to available employment opportunities. Lower income groups, and those in rural areas and outer islands, tend to have much less access to skills development. Girls and women in particular tend to be under-enrolled in TVET, or concentrated in traditional female occupations.

Quality

- All PICs have major challenges in terms of quality of education currently provided. The data from literacy and numeracy tests in primary education paints a picture of stagnating quality or even regression.
- A second quality concern is that of the inadequate supply of teaching quality. While several countries (FSM, Palau, RMI, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) have considerable challenges in terms of qualifications and certification of their teachers, even those countries with teacher workforces in which close to all teachers are qualified (Fiji, PNG and Samoa) have critical challenges in terms of teacher and head teacher/principal competence. Large numbers of untrained teachers, low teacher competence, high teacher absenteeism and migration of trained teachers continue to be a concern in many PICs.
- In the TVET sub-sector, low occupational standards, irrelevant curriculum, lack of qualified instructors, limited resources and necessary equipment, and quality assurance mechanisms contribute to the overall low quality of TVET in PICs. Training systems tend to operate in isolation of labour market demand and with little employer participation.

Efficiency and effectiveness

- One of the major challenges facing every PIC is the issue of securing sustainable resources to underpin quality and expansion of the education sector. Though the education sector has the high share of public expenditure, over 90% of educational expenditure in the region goes towards teacher salaries with little left for quality related efforts¹, that requires specific financial commitment. Basic gaps include school resources, initial teacher education/training, ongoing professional development as well as capacity development at Ministry level. In order to bring about effective and efficient education reform, there is a dire need to rethink educational investment to address the pressing challenges.

Background

The *2012 Pacific MDGs Tracking Report*² provides an analysis of progress made by Pacific Island Countries (PICs) in regards to the MDGs. The Report in terms of Goal 2, *Achieving Universal Primary Education*, shows overall some mixed results for the Pacific region. This is especially so for some countries in Melanesia and Micronesia. However, countries of the Polynesian group (Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu) together with Fiji, Nauru and Palau are all on track to achieve MDG 2 by 2015.

In terms of gender equality in education, Goal 3, Target 3.A (elimination of gender disparity in all levels of education), apart from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Solomon Islands all PICs are on track. Self-reported youth literacy rates among 15-24 years old in almost all the PICTs range between 90-100%, except for PNG at 63%.

Access to basic education in PICTs is determined by a number of factors. Such factors include isolation and distance from existing schools, absence of relevant policies and legislations that enforce school attendance, weak and ineffective support to education from parents, low levels of school preparedness and the high costs of education for poor families. Though data is still weak, disability keeps many Pacific children out of school. The development of international conventions such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* and international efforts such as the

¹ World Bank 2006, pvi.

² Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, August 2012

Education for All (EFA) initiative have brought about major reforms in education in the region. The concept of education as a human right and that every child has the right to education is having an impact on governments' commitment to education and leading policy and legislative reforms.

Children's performance in basic education is also a concern. Many children do not acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them to continue in the school system. In Vanuatu, 34% of children fail to complete primary education, and only 13% will complete secondary education³. Access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which helps to prepare children for primary school is inconsistent across the Pacific, with most ECE located in urban areas.

PICTs are now putting in place policies and legislations on compulsory education with governments taking a lead role in the financing and resourcing of education especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. It has been generally observed that most PICTs provide subsidies to basic education in the form of school grants with the intent of reducing the economic burden of education, especially to poor families. However countries still need support in terms of other costs that relate to quality improvement and are still reliant on donors and development partners in this respect.

The policy context at the regional level is positive with expressed commitment to education. The idea of having a regional framework to guide the further development of Pacific education has been strongly supported by Pacific Forum countries through their education ministries, as well as development partners. In 2009 Forum Education Ministers endorsed the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF). It is aligned with global commitments such as the EFA goals, the MDGs relating directly or indirectly to education, the UN Literacy Decade and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Other relevant concurrent regional education policy includes the 2006 Pacific ESD Framework and its 2008 Action Plan, and the 2010 Culture and Education Strategy. The establishment of a Pacific Regional Council on ECCE has fostered the development of regional quality standards. The proposal to develop a framework for climate change and disaster risk management education for the Pacific was endorsed at the FE dMM (2012). These policies and initiative collectively reinforce the vision of futures-thinking quality contextualized education for all in the PICTs.

The geographical distribution of most island states in the Pacific gives rise to questions of quality and equity issues in service delivery especially between urban and isolated rural schools. This has been recognized in certain reports⁴ and reviews conducted within the education sector in the region. The wide spread of islands in some of the countries in the Pacific poses a major challenge to education service delivery in those countries, and poses a particular challenge for children with disabilities.

Pacific nations are highly reliant on biological resources and healthy ecosystems. These systems are being threatened as a result of loss of biological diversity, land and coastal degradation, land and sea-base pollution, changing weather patterns, and increased salinity levels of fresh water to mention a few. Lack of understanding among Pacific peoples and weak institutional capacity in environmental planning and management makes the people of the region vulnerable to these threats. These challenges affect all Pacific countries, but the special situation of Small Island States in relation to sustainable development is an acute challenge.⁵

Introducing ESD, including climate change and disaster risk management education, through formal schooling, informal learning, and awareness activities can and should play active roles in stimulating

³ Vanuatu Ministry of Education, VEMIS, 2010

⁴ Report on the Review of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) 2008

⁵ PEDF, p. 20

the next generation to demand, generate, interpret, and apply information on current and future environments, and bolster peoples' abilities to build adaptive capacity. To ensure relevance and effective learning, the delivery of knowledge, for example on climate change, should be oriented towards local contexts and experiences, and should prioritize traditional and indigenous knowledge on dealing with changes. This will require inclusion of ESD approaches in existing curricula, to prepare specific and relevant material and to support training for teachers, curriculum developers and policy makers.

Other related issues such as non-communicable diseases, sexually transmitted infections and reproductive health, culture and traditions, and civics education amongst others, will also need consideration in future curriculum development.

With the vision of the PEDF *"Quality education for all in Pacific Island countries"*, Forum Education Ministers have committed to a mission to enable each Pacific learner to develop all his/her talents and creativities to the full and thereby enabling each person to take responsibility for his/her own life and make a meaningful contribution to the social, cultural and economic development of Pacific society.

As countries move towards achieving MDG 2, the next challenge is to improve on quality and equity in service delivery, early childhood care and education, primary retention and completion and progression into secondary level of education. Focused efforts are required to address the educational needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.