



Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development

Concept Note

Pacific Early Childhood Development (ECD) Forum 2023

‘Building a Resilient Blue Pacific Through Early Childhood Development’

Date: February 2023

Venue: Nadi

Brief Description

The 2023 Pacific Early Childhood Development (ECD) Forum, with the theme Building a Resilient Blue Pacific Through Early Childhood Development, will be a 3-day high-level forum for 15 Pacific Island governments to discuss early childhood investments as a critical component of building resilience to climate change, natural disasters and other emergencies. The forum will also gather governments to discuss advances made since the declaration of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD in 2017 – the region’s nine-point action agenda that lays out critical national efforts to secure the optimal development of young children. A key output of the forum is adding action point #10 to the Pasifika Call to Action, identifying what countries should do on ECD to build resilient Pacific communities.

The Forum builds on similar multi-sectoral and inter-governmental gatherings in 2017 and 2019 in Fiji, organized by the Pacific Regional Council for ECD (PRC4ECD) and UNICEF, with the support of the New Zealand government and other partners. The forum will have a blended modality, with in-person and virtual participation.

Background

The Pacific is at an unprecedented juncture in its history. It contends with increasingly heightened geostrategic competition, a climate change emergency and continues to navigate its economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this context, the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, endorsed by Pacific Leaders at the 51st Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in July 2022, frames the region’s vision for the next 30 years. The Strategy is the Pacific’s overarching blueprint to strengthen collective action and deepen regionalism for the next three decades.

The collective actions to deliver on the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* are guided by Pacific values, seven interconnected thematic areas and five strategic pathways to ensure inclusivity, equity and equality, and resilient, peaceful, safe and stable communities and countries for the wellbeing and security for all Pacific peoples. The Strategy emphasizes the importance of strengthening the capacity of Pacific peoples to respond effectively to adversity while building resilience to sustain free, healthy and productive livelihoods.

Children born today will be critical actors in realizing Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ 2050 vision “...for a resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity that ensures all Pacific

peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives”¹. This requires actions now to ensure Pacific children reach their full potential and build a future for themselves, their families, their communities, countries and the Blue Pacific Continent.

Young children bear the brunt of the crippling impacts of COVID-19, the devastating effects of climate change and other disasters, and social challenges in the Pacific which threaten to scale back what progress the region has achieved on a range of child development issues, including health, nutrition and schooling outcomes.

Investments in young children produce dividends that can counteract this crisis - delivering children’s rights, responding effectively to the human capital shock brought by COVID-19, building resilience against the effects of climate change, and contributing to the Pacific’s long-term socio-economic development. ECD investments propel social and economic opportunities, which in turn drive the progressive expansion and sustainability of the ECD system and the larger development framework. They build the foundation for productive adulthood and cohesive communities and societies, strengthening a country’s future workforce and economy. Ensuring that all children, including the most vulnerable, have the best start to life is a well-founded way to stabilize individuals, communities and societies over the long-term.

With children out-of-school and social costs escalating, investing in young children can substantially offset the human capital losses from the COVID19 pandemic and prepare the future labour force for the opportunities that the crisis is creating. Channelling COVID19 resources into ECD generates multiple benefits: (i) creating an effective fiscal stimulus that counters the economic crisis; (ii) providing the most effective mechanism for tackling the human capital shock by countering the long-term educational losses that school closures have threatened; (iii) providing responsive interventions such as social protection and fiscal transfers to minimize disruption to ECD service delivery; and (iv) building back a better and more resilient human capital system that aligns economies to the opportunities of the twenty-first century.

ECD investments also present compelling opportunities to mitigate climate change and adapt to future climate crises. ECD investments can generate the triple dividend of resilience that climate change financing often strives for: (1) reduce and prevent losses resulting from climate change and disaster events by building the core human resource capabilities to better cope with shocks and crises, (2) stimulate additional development potential and economic activity by developing the cognitive capital stock of Pacific Island countries to benefit from the evolving climate-friendly economic growth opportunities of the twenty-first century, (3) manage trade-offs through investments that leverage social, environmental and economic co-benefits. An effective ECD strategy starts with core sectoral investments and subsequently works to build synergies across structures and sectors to multiply impacts. Although major inputs are expected from both health and education sectors, the contribution of other ministries to ECD is equally important. Budgetary allocations, social welfare grants, protective services, birth registration, access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, mobility, equality and functional infrastructure are all critical and should be linked with each other. Pacific Island leaders have been making significant progress on ECD, demonstrating the political will and whole-of-society action to support the optimal development of its youngest citizens. Guided by the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD (see figure below), countries have been making coordinated ECD investments, national multi-sectoral ECD policies and improved services in early childhood education, health, nutrition, child protection, WASH, child-focused social protection and parenting support.

The Pacific Regional Council for ECD has been acting as the main regional mechanism for joint political leadership to drive these actions and investments on ECD. Established at the 2nd Pacific ECD Forum in 2019

¹ PIF Leaders vision for the Blue Pacific Continent as stated in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, endorsed at the 51st PIF Leaders Meeting held in Suva, Fiji from 11 – 14 July 2022. <https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/>

in Nadi with representation of Ministers of finance, education, health and social welfare, the council is a model of a high-level, geo-political network for ECD and is the custodian of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD.

Purpose

The purpose of the 2023 Pacific ECD Forum is for governments to discuss improved investments and multi-sectoral collaboration in ECD – specifically as a strategic component of building resilience to COVID19, climate change and other disasters.

As it has been known for in the 2017 and 2019 gatherings, the 2022 Pacific ECD is expected to further catalyze coordinated and amplified action on ECD. A key objective would be to agree and endorse action point #10 to add to the nine points of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD – focusing on resilience-building opportunities that ECD presents. In addition, the forum will provide opportunities for Pacific Island governments to share successes, challenges, and lessons learned in their implementation of the **Pasifika Call to Action on ECD**.

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that participants will:

- Agree and endorse action point #10 on ECD and resilience.
- Promote south-south cooperation and learning on ECD, as Pacific Island countries share successes, challenges and lessons learned in implementing the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD;
- Discuss latest ECD global developments and apply these to improve ECD service delivery in the Pacific.

Programme Overview

The overarching theme of the Forum will be *Building a Resilient Blue Pacific Through Early Childhood Development* and will comprise the thematic priorities on ECD across the three days. The Forum will have interactive panel presentations on key ECD themes from leading global and Pacific experts and Pacific country representatives, groupwork to identify regional and country actions on ECD, and a plenary discussion on action point #10 for ECD and resilience.

The PRC4ECD Ministers are expected to convene their second meeting at the Forum. A partners’ roundtable is also being planned to follow the forum.

Participants

The Forum will be by-invitation only including representatives from all 15 member countries of the PRC4ECD².



² Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu

Participants will be leaders and high-level officials level (Ministers and Permanent Secretaries) from ministries typically associated with early childhood development, including but not limited to the Ministries of Education, Health, Finance, Planning, Social Welfare, Internal Affairs, etc. This would include all 15 member countries of the PRC4ECD: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Where national ECD Committees exist in the country, representatives from these committees will be prioritized to attend the forum.

Select representatives from multilateral, bilateral organizations, academia, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders will also be invited to provide technical support to the discussions.

Organizing Committee:

PRC4ECD Steering Committee, UNICEF Pacific, PIFS, and relevant stakeholders.