



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS MEETING

*Auckland, New Zealand
26-28 November 2007*

FORUM BASIC EDUCATION ACTION PLAN – 2007 REVIEW

Preamble

Ministers of Education of the Pacific Islands Forum met at the Waipuna Hotel and Conference Centre, Mt. Wellington, **Auckland, New Zealand, on 27 and 28 November 2007** to consider issues related to the implementation and enhancement of the 2001 Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) and to deliberate on the meeting theme on enhancing educational outcomes for Pacific children and youth.

2. The meeting was chaired by the Honourable Chris Carter, Minister of Education, New Zealand and the Associate Minister of Education of New Zealand, the Honourable Parekura Horomia. In attendance were the Prime Minister and Minister of Education from Cook Islands and Ministers from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga. Also in attendance were representatives from Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Observers comprised representatives of Tokelau, Timor Leste, South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment, University of the South Pacific, PRIDE Project, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Oceania Football Confederation, Commonwealth of Learning, European Union, NZAID, UNESCO Office for the Pacific States, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding, New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank.

Traditional Welcome and Opening

3. The Official Welcome and Opening address was delivered by the New Zealand Associate Minister of Education, the Honourable Parekura Horomia at the University of Auckland's Fale Pasifika on the evening of Monday 26 November 2007.

Opening session

4. Honourable Horomia welcomed participants and thanked them for attending the official opening dinner held the previous night, 26 November 2007 and for the warm welcome during the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting in Fiji in 2006. Honourable Horomia also thanked the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, UNESCO, World Bank and WHO for supporting education initiatives in the Pacific region.

5. Honourable Chris Carter, as Chair, acknowledged the presence of the Prime Minister from the Cook Islands. Honourable Carter also acknowledged commitment of countries in providing quality education. He reiterated that education is the key to opportunity and that there is a real challenge for lifting education standards in the region.

6. The Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Mr Feleti Teo, welcomed participants to the meeting, noting that it was the sixth meeting of Forum Education ministers. He thanked the New Zealand Government for hosting the official opening dinner and the 2007 Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEEdMM) and for logistical support for the convening of the 2007 meeting

7. The Deputy Secretary General stated that the Forum Secretariat is very happy to be able to play its part in creating an environment where many stakeholders are able to report on their work in education in the region and was pleased with the depth of partnership and collaboration amongst key education stakeholders in the region in the planning and implementation of key regional education initiatives including Inclusive Education and Early Childhood Education.

8. He highlighted that this may be the last Ministerial meeting before PRIDE Project is integrated into Institute of Education (IOE) at the University of the South Pacific (USP) so this meeting was important to consider the post PRIDE period. The Deputy Secretary General also noted that given that this was the seventh year since FBEAP was formulated, it was timely that Ministers consider the consolidation of the Plan.

9. The Deputy Secretary General noted the large number of observers and thanked them for their participation and support highlighting that most of the observers are development partners involved in the implementation of the FBEAP initiatives. He further stressed that while support for education at national and regional levels was important and welcomed, regional organisations must handle with sensitivity the implementation of regional projects to ensure they add value to national initiatives.

Implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan

10. Ministers reviewed the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) and noted the regional initiatives that have been on-going and recently implemented as well as suggestions for further actions for consideration. Ministers also noted initiatives currently being implemented at the national level.

11. Ministers noted that the FBEAP was now seven years in existence and that it was timely to undertake a thorough review of the contents of the Plan and its relevance to the educational priorities expressed by member countries.

12. Ministers further noted the FBEAP initiatives currently being implemented by key partners and stakeholders. Ministers raised their concern that the ADB study focused on

identifying skills for economic development and lacked focus on developing traditional skills that would be important for students returning to their communities.

13. Ministers:

- a. noted the contents of the Regional Skills Development report and directed the Forum Secretariat to continue to seek funding for the proposed regional projects that would incorporate traditional skills as an integral component of overall skills development;
- b. noted progress on the development of the Regional Qualifications Register;
- c. noted the paper on non-formal education (PIFS(07)FEDMA.04(c)) and requested UNESCO, regional organisations and other stakeholders to continue their work in non-formal education, working towards the development of a regional approach to non-formal education;
- d. considered and endorsed the implementation of the outcomes of the regional workshop on early childhood care and education, specifically:
 - i. that each Government work with stakeholders to develop its national policy for early childhood care and education with age parameters to be set nationally;
 - ii. that a national advisory body is established to advise government on early childhood matters;
 - iii. that a regional council is established to coordinate professional and community issues relating to early childhood in the Pacific;
 - iv. that early childhood curriculum, teaching pedagogies, assessment strategies, resources and teacher education are grounded in local cultures and languages; and
 - v. that data for 0-8 year olds in both licensed and unlicensed centres are included in the education management information system.
- e. considered and endorsed the implementation of the outcomes of the regional workshop on Inclusive Education, specifically to:
 - i. note the progress for Inclusive Education at the regional and national level and supporting the current paradigm shift from the charity and medical models to social and rights-based models of disability;
 - ii. note the actions required in the Biwako Millennium Framework (BMF) and the BMF plus 5 as a basis of advancing Inclusive Education at the policy level of Forum Island Countries;
 - iii. endorse an integrated approach to Inclusive Education that recognises all children's right to education; and
 - viii. endorse the use of the UNESCO toolkit on Inclusive Education as the basis for promoting the philosophies of Inclusive Education in Forum Island Countries.
- f. noted the results of stocktake report on the implementation of the FBEAP at a national level;
- g. noted the gaps identified at the national level in the provision and achievement of quality education; and

- h. endorsed a full evaluation of the FBEAP in 2008 that would result in a revised and consolidated action plan; including the Education Ministerial meeting process; and options for an appropriate regional support mechanism for education.

Review of the Implementation of the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE) Project

14. Ministers reviewed the progress on PRIDE, and expressed their appreciation for assistance provided to their countries. Ministers also noted that this may be the last ministerial meeting before the PRIDE Project is finally integrated into USP's Institute of Education.

15. Ministers raised their concerns on the absence of a PRIDE Director and whether this had affected the provision of oversight to the projects direction. Ministers also raised their concerns on whether an exit strategy existed and on the long term sustainability of the project.

16. Ministers acknowledged the funding period for the PRIDE project was drawing to a close and there must be a concerted effort to seeking additional funding for the continuation of the PRIDE project. Ministers expressed concern that the PRIDE project would be integrated into IOE.

17. Ministers acknowledged the important achievements of the PRIDE project in the implementation of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan and the National Educational Plans of the countries. In view of the project's imminent closure at the end of 2009, Ministers tasked the Forum Secretariat to seek funding opportunities for the continuation of the project.

18. Ministers:

- a. noted the progress of PRIDE;
- b. agreed to continue to provide support for the PRIDE Project; and
- c. agreed that the Forum Secretariat seek additional funds for the continuation of the PRIDE Project beyond its current funding period.

Education For All Mid-Decade Assessment

19. Minister heard a presentation from UNESCO on the need to monitor progress towards achieving education goals (national, regional and global) and to identify gaps in achieving the identified goals. Ministers were informed that the lack of appropriate data from countries had prevented the development of a thorough analysis of the situation with education initiatives and status of education in the region.

20. Considering the importance of data in evidence-based planning and policy formulation, Ministers acknowledged the urgent need to collect data that are urgently

needed as the basis for policy review / development as well as planning and resource allocation.

21. Ministers further acknowledged that countries need to ensure that appropriate staff are available for capacity development as it would go a long way in ensuring sustainability in the area of data collection, data analysis / interpretation and reporting on status of education in each country.

22. Ministers:

- a. agreed to give priority to the collection and management of the relevant education data at country level, given the importance of evidence-based data for planning and policy formulation and revision;
- b. endorsed the efforts of development agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF, PRIDE, SPBEA, etc) to continue working with countries to ensure the process of monitoring the education initiatives (FBEAP, EFA, MDG) are successfully completed; and
- c. endorsed the efforts of development and donor agencies to continue to work with countries improve the quality of the education management information system (EMIS) so that appropriate data are available when needed.

UNESCO National Education Strategies

23. Ministers heard a presentation on the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) which is part of UNESCO's reform in response to the UN Reform and "Delivering as One". Ministers were informed that UNESS is the official planning tool for UNESCO and defines its in-country support strategy which is a complete turn around from previous strategy that was thematic and regionally focused.

24. Ministers were informed that this approach involved responding to national priorities rather than focusing on UNESCO's mandate and includes the analysis and interpretation of existing information complemented with discussion and consultations with stakeholders. The Ministers noted that the UNESS document becomes UNESCO's planning document for its long term (6years) and short term (2years) support strategy for each country.

Sector Wide Approaches in Pacific Education

25. Ministers heard a presentation by the Ministry of Education, Women and Culture (MEWAC), Tonga, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), Solomon Islands, and Education Team, New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) on Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp) in Pacific education.

26. Ministers were informed that the SWAp approach to education sector development is providing a useful framework for partnership between donors and education stakeholders. The SWAp approach also brings about effectiveness in donor

harmonisation, lower transaction costs for governments and education departments, improved monitoring and evaluation of education initiatives as well as achievement of key education development goals nationally, regionally and globally.

27. Ministers noted that there is no blueprint for a SWAp. Every country has to find its own way in developing the most ideal SWAp. When there is sufficient consultation with all stakeholders, the SWAp will be effectively supported and implemented. As such, SWAp is a participatory process and the active involvement from all stakeholders in dynamic sector wide dialogue is crucially important.

28. Ministers were informed of several challenges in the adoption of the SWAp approach. The challenges include the management and coordination of SWAp, the need for quality database management and monitoring that would support information based decision making, better coordination of all stakeholders and committed ownership and strong leadership for the SWAp approach.

29. Ministers noted that while many issues and challenges remain, there is emerging evidence of some of the benefits of SWAp especially in relation to strengthening local capacity building in strategic planning and policy making, enhanced awareness of the need for national ownership and coordination of education development, strong national leadership and to overall aid effectiveness.

30. Ministers noted the presentation on Sector Wide Approaches, in particular the benefits and challenges to recipient countries.

Draft Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development

31. Ministers recalled their agreement in 2006 to use the Pacific Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework, and other regional frameworks and action plans as the basis for completing a Pacific Regional Action Plan to guide ESD in Forum member countries. Ministers also recalled their agreement to use the combined CROP Human Resource Development (HRD) and Sustainable Development (SD) Working Group mechanism to take this initiative forward.

32. Ministers were provided with an update from the University of the South Pacific on the preparation of the *Education for Sustainable Development Pacific Regional Action Plan*. Ministers were informed that the joint Working Groups agreed that the *Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development* (PACE-SD) with its mandate within USP would coordinate the development of the Pacific Regional Action Plan for ESD. The joint Working Groups also agreed that a Technical Working Group (TWG) would work with PACE to develop the draft Action Plan in consultation with countries, involving Ministries and Department of Education, Department of Environment, Planning and a cross section of other stakeholders.

33. Ministers were informed that the Action Plan is a living document which provides a common platform for all regional organisations and development partners in the promotion of ESD in the region and is the result of this broad consultation.

34. Ministers noted that while the development of the Action Plan was straightforward, the most difficult phase would be the implementation of the Plan given the number of initiatives that need to be addressed. In addition, coordination of all activities would be a major challenge. Ministers acknowledged that support from countries on the implementation of the Action Plan was crucial.

35. Ministers:

- a. noted the progress made by the ESD Technical Working group;
- b. considered and endorsed the Draft ESD Pacific Regional Action Plan; and
- c. noted the need to strategise the implementation of the Action Plan

The Islands of Wisdom (and Learning); the Role of ICT and Distance Mode in Education Reform in Solomon Islands: the Case of the Distance Learning Centres Project

36. Ministers recalled their support in 2006 of the work of UNESCO, PRIDE, the Commonwealth of Learning and other partners, in furthering development of work in ICT in education policy and planning and in strengthening the implementation of the Regional Digital Strategy.

37. Ministers heard a presentation from Mr David Leeming, a Consultant from the Solomon Islands on the Distance Learning Centers Project in Solomon Islands funded by the European Union. Mr Leeming outlined the use of technology in enhancing learning opportunities particularly in remote communities.

38. Ministers appreciated the opportunity to further develop ICT in schools with the use the one laptop per child (OLPC) computers; however, further noting that the use of computers must be complemented by appropriate educational input and trained personnel to make computers valuable. Ministers highlighted the importance of protecting students against the negative impacts of internet access particularly to pornography.

39. Ministers acknowledged the need to be mindful of the associated costs of this initiative and appealed for the support of donors for the development of ICT in the education system.

40. Ministers:

- a. agreed that at the regional level to request regional and international agencies to work closely with countries to:
 - i. share and replicate best practice and models for harnessing information and communications technology to improve access to quality education,

- especially for the remote and rural communities, especially through application of the distance learning mode;
 - ii. consider introducing models for bridging the rural-urban digital divide in the region, using emerging and lower cost wireless, solar-powered and ‘eco-friendly’ last-mile solutions, with new VSAT technologies for infrastructure, and low cost laptop technology such as OLCP;
 - iii. develop and share repositories of pertinent locally relevant information and education materials; and
 - iv. design interventions involving ICT for educational use in remote areas to encourage synergy and partnerships that multiply the development impacts.
- b. noted that at the national level, countries could consider:
- i. making electronic resources more available to schools;
 - ii. introducing simple first steps in creating an eLearning content capacity into curriculum development in the region;
 - iii. providing wider access to ICT training at all levels, leading to overall capacity development and awareness about ICT and education; and
 - iv. encouraging coordination with national regulatory authorities to create national ICT policies that enable, rather than restrict, the full potential of modern Internet-based technologies and regional opportunities in improving connectivity for their education systems.

Report from the Ministers Retreat

41. Ministers noted in their retreat that all countries are concerned with providing educational options to suit the needs of all students’ abilities and interests as well as the needs of their communities. There was an expressed need to incorporate traditional skills into education, especially into TVET. This has been implemented in some countries but such programmes require special facilities which can be costly.

42. There was a proposal for more intra-regional TVET opportunities, especially as small island countries cannot provide the training needs of all. Such training does exist to a limited extent and should be enhanced when the Australia Pacific Technical College is fully underway.

43. Linked to discussions on TVET was discussion on the parity and equivalence of qualifications across the region and the Regional Qualifications Register that will tie all national qualifications mechanisms together.

44. Ministers reiterated their support for the FBEAP and noted that it should be an ongoing living document that can be revised and consolidated to match changing needs. It should include the priorities of Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals. It was further noted that there should be more advocacy for the FBEAP.

45. Countries expressed their appreciation of PRIDE, especially for sub-projects assist to fulfil aspects of education sector plans and national sustainable development

strategies. There was, however, concern expressed that in the past year there has been poor communications between the project and countries. Concern was also expressed at the integration of the project into USP's Institute of Education, especially by countries that are not members of USP. Ministers expressed concern on the relative lack of information provided on PRIDE, especially financial information. There was a strong feeling that PRIDE should continue if donor funding were available, preferably as a stand-alone project.

Other Issues

Oceania Football Confederation

46. The Oceania Football Confederation provided the Ministers an outline of their current activities in the Pacific. Ministers noted the contents of the presentation and expressed their appreciation of the work being undertaken by the Confederation.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community

47. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) briefed Ministers' on the preliminary findings of its Youth Mapping Exercise and the proposed way forward to respond to the findings of the mapping exercise.

48. Ministers were informed that an important next step is the development of an integrated multi-stakeholder coordination framework for responding to the finding of the mapping.

49. Ministers:

- a. noted the progress of the Pacific Youth Mapping Exercise; and
- b. supported the planned development of an integrated multi-stakeholder framework for responding to the findings of the mapping exercise.

Teacher and Education in the Pacific Project.

50. The University of the South Pacific's Institute of Education briefed Ministers on the progress of the Teacher and Education in the Pacific Project.

51. Ministers requested that the University of the South Pacific look into the possibility of providing professional training for Principals and Deputy Principals.

Stepping up Pasifika Education from Good to Great

52. The New Zealand Ministry of Education briefed Ministers on their initiative for Stepping up Pasifika Education from Good to Great.

Next Meeting

54. Ministers agreed that Education Ministers convene their seventh meeting in March 2009 in Tonga.

55. The Chair thanked all concerned with the organisation of the meeting.

*Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Auckland, New Zealand
28 November 2007*