JANUARY 29, 2021

GRANTS AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

ALLOCATION FOR A REGIONAL ESPIG TO PACIFIC SIDS

Reference	Decision
GPC/2021/01-04	**Allocation for a Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grant to Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS):** The Grants and Performance Committee in its delegated authority from the Board and with respect to the application submitted in the fourth round of 2020: 1. Notes compliance with the requirements for accessing the maximum country allocation (MCA) for a regional education sector program implementation grant (ESPIG), as described in the application and summarized and assessed in GPC/2021/01 DOC 04. 2. Approves an allocation from GPE trust funds for a regional ESPIG, as described in the application submitted and summarized in Table 1 in GPC/2021/01-04 2 (c), subject to: a. Availability of funds. b. Board decision BOD/2012/11-04 on commitment of trust funds for ESPIGs in annual installments. c. Secretariat recommendations for funding, including (all

amounts in US$):

Table 1 – Pacific SIDS[1]		
a.	ESPIG Maximum Country Allocation	15,000,000
b.	Fixed Part	15,000,000
c.	Variable Part	N/A
d.	Allocation Requested	14,997,510 [2]
e.	**Allocation Approved by GPC**	**14,997,510**
f.	Grant Agent	Asian Development Bank
g.	Agency Fee % - Amount	5% - 749,875.50
h.	Period	31.5 months
i.	Expected Start Date	May 15, 2021
j.	Funding Source	GPE Fund

3. Requests the Secretariat to:
   a. Include in its notification of grant approval to the Pacific island states the observations and requests for report-back set out in Annex A.
   b. Include an update on the issues listed as report back in Annex A in the annual Grant Status Report in accordance with the specified timeline.

[1] The Pacific SIDS allocation is a multi-country allocation, including Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu.

[2] Includes US$544,711 for the cost of the grant agent to perform its roles and responsibilities.

Annex A – GPC Observations and Report-Backs

Pacific SIDs	
Observations	The Committee commends the strong efforts made by all stakeholders over a significant period of time in support of the innovative development of the first regional ESPIG for the Pacific, whereby the grant will support an equitable increase in the quality of schooling and student learning outcomes across the Pacific in the form of Regional Goods, Services and Standards. Given the complexity of the grant with use of multiple implementing agencies, the Committee requests the grant agent to closely monitor the effectiveness of the implementation arrangements, and encourages the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) Facilitation Unit, the grant agent and the implementing agencies, as well as donor partners to ensure that the Regional Goods are implemented with strong national ownership. The Committee further emphasizes the importance of inviting civil society organizations to collaborate on the PacREF implementation in an adequate measure. The Committee notes the impact of the pandemic on education systems. The Committee encourages the governments and the grant agent, in consultation with the local education group, not to hesitate to adapt the proposed program to emerging issues, notably impact on children learning as a result of school closures, whenever needs arise. Other adaptations to consider could relate to mitigation measures on potential delays or other constraints that the pandemic may have on program implementation.
Report-Backs	*For the grant agent*: The Committee notes the progress that has been made with regard to data collection, analysis and management. The Committee looks forward to learning about further progress in the grant agent's regular progress reports, especially in terms of data on gender and on children with disabilities, as well as on indicators reported to UIS. The Committee also looks forward to receiving updates from the grant agent via its regular progress report on the outcomes of the planned study, *Financing of Education in the Pacific,* and on subsequent policy

	dialogue via the Forum of Education Ministers Meeting, including how those outcomes are applied towards leveraging an adequate level of domestic financing, in particular for primary education for countries which have not reached Universal Primary Education. In this sense, the Committee would like the regular progress reports to include domestic financing data of the applicant countries (GPE-6) on the share of the education budget in the total government budget as well as the share of the primary education budget in the total education budget.

Annex B – Secretariat quality assurance review phase III report

QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – PHASE 3

PACIFIC REGION

Regional ESPIG

Total Program Cost: US$19,682,882
Proposed GPE Grant Amount: US$ 14,997,510 (no Variable Part), of which US$ 544,711 for Grant Agent's Implementation Support Costs
Implementation period: 31.5 months
Projected implementation start date: May 15, 2021
Grant Agent: Asian Development Bank

1. BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION SECTOR OVERVIEW

1.1. COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The Pacific Regional application encompasses six Small Island Developing States (SIDS), i.e. Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu, who decided to adopt a regional approach and combine their Maximum Country Allocations (MCAs) of US$ 2.5 million each into a single regional application for an Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG)[1].

The Pacific islands are a culturally diverse group of countries with similar challenges due to their small size, isolation, and remoteness. The islands are spread out across the Pacific Ocean over an area equivalent to 15 percent of the earth's surface and have a combined population of 2.3 million people scattered across hundreds of islands.[2] Given their limited resources and large distance from major markets, the Pacific SIDS have small, narrow economies that are vulnerable

[1] Following the decision of the Board of Director of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in December 2019, new indicative maximum country allocations (MCAs) of USD 2.5 million were announced for eight Pacific Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), namely Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Due to their modest size, these countries were provided the opportunity to combine their allocations to form multi-country applications based on their national education sector plans or a regional grant application based on a regional education sector plan. By October 2019, six of the eight countries decided to take part in a regional approach where they pool their MCAs to one regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG) based on the regional sector plan entitled the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF).

[2] World Bank (October 2020). Pacific Islands Overview. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview

to external shocks and experience a high degree of volatility.[3] Economic growth is further constrained by a shortage of skilled workers, youth unemployment, limited interconnectivity, weak transport infrastructure[4] and high migration rates. A high proportion of food is imported even though fishing and agriculture are amongst the main industries. Their small population, remote location and distance from one another also hampers communication as well as the provision of all public services.

Pacific islands are also amongst the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change and natural disasters.[5] Most of the population lives along the coast placing them at high risk to rising sea levels and saltwater inundation. The islands are exposed to tropical cyclones, droughts and floods, which can have devastating impacts on livelihoods and infrastructure. For example, in Tuvalu, environmental conditions triggered 9 percent of recorded population movements between 2005-2015, while more than 70 percent of the households indicated that environmental factors have affected their basic living conditions.[6]

The COVID-19 pandemic is further compounding challenges to sustainable development. Although its full impact will not be known for some time, at present, the pandemic has already severely affected tourism and trade sectors, caused school closures, and increased unemployment in the region.[7]

To face these unique challenges, the Pacific Leaders Forum adopted regionalism in 2005 to strengthen cooperation and integration between Pacific countries in areas where working together would yield better outcomes rather than separate. In 2015, the Forum endorsed the Framework for Pacific Regionalism that today shapes the work of the Pacific Islands Forum.[8] To advance both regional and national goals, many Pacific SIDS, including the GPE-6, rely heavily on external aid, mainly from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and the United States.

Table 1. Country Information

Population (2018, World Bank)	Kiribati: 115,847 Republic of the Marshall Islands: 58,413

[3] World Bank (October 2020). Pacific Islands Overview. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pacificislands/overview

[4] ADB Institute (2016). Economic Growth and Sustainable Development. *Policy Briefs Series (2016-6)*. Retrieved from https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/219266/adbi-pb2016-6.pdf. ADB: Tokyo.

[5] UNESCO (2017). Towards climate change resilience – Minimizing loss and damage in Pacific SIDS communities. UNESCO: Apia. 32p

[6] United Nations University (2017). Pacific Islanders Faced with Migration can benefit from Paris Agreement.

[7] Pacific Islands Regional application form, page 10.

[8] The Pacific Islands Forum is an inter-governmental organization that aims at enhancing cooperation between countries and territories of the Pacific Ocean.

	Samoa: 196,130 Solomon Islands: 652,858 Tonga: 103,197 Tuvalu: 11,508
Human Development Index Ranking (UNDP 2019)[9]	Kiribati: 132 out of 189 countries Republic of the Marshall Islands: 117 out of 189 countries Samoa: 111 out of 189 countries Solomon Islands: 153 out of 189 countries Tonga: 105 out of 189 countries Tuvalu: N/A
Learning-adjusted Years of School (World Bank, Human Capital Index 2020)[10]	Kiribati: 7.1 Republic of the Marshall Islands: N/A Samoa: N/A Solomon Islands: Boys: 5.3, Girls: 5.4 Tonga: Boys: 6.2, Girls: 6.9 Tuvalu: 7.4
GDP (World Bank, 2018)[11]	Kiribati: 196.8 million USD Republic of the Marshall Islands: 221.3 million USD Samoa: 820.5 million USD Solomon Islands: 1.396 billion USD Tonga: 450.4 million USD Tuvalu: 42.59 million USD
GDP per capita (World Bank, 2018)[12]	Kiribati: 1,625USD Republic of the Marshall Islands: 3,788 USD Samoa: 4,183 USD Solomon Islands: 2,138 USD Tonga: 4,364 USD Tuvalu: 3,701 USD
World Bank Income Classification Level (World Bank, 2020)[13]	Kiribati: Lower middle income Republic of the Marshall Islands: Upper middle income Samoa: Upper middle income Solomon Islands: Lower middle income Tonga: Upper middle income Tuvalu: Upper middle income

[9] Information regarding the Human Development Index Ranking can be retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking

[10] These data can be retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital

[11] These data can be retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD

[12] These data can be retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD

[13] World Bank Country classification by income level can be retrieved from https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups

1.2. EDUCATION SECTOR OVERVIEW

Pacific SIDS have different structures for their education systems (Table 2). While there has been important progress in access to primary and lower-secondary education as well as improvements in addressing gender disparities, many challenges remain. Key challenges for the sector identified by the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF[14]) include: 1) access and retention, particularly at the secondary level; 2) equity in access, particularly for children living in remote outer islands, low income families, and the disabled; 3) internal efficiency of the system, including delayed entry in school and high rates of repetition and drop out; 4) low quality of education leading to poor learning outcomes; 5) ineffective management at school and system level; 6) inadequate funding and inefficient use of resources; and 7) poor intra-sector coordination, particularly for ECD, TVET and non-formal education.[15] It is noted that there is strong community and faith-based group participation in the management of schools at all level, across the Pacific, which leads to the situation where about 15 percent of primary and 40 percent of secondary schools are non-public schools[16]. All schools across the Pacific are regulated under relevant national education acts[17].

Table 2: Structure of the Education System and Number of Students

Country	Structure of the Education System	Number of students[18]
Kiribati	1-3 years of pre-primary, 6 years of primary, 3 years of lower secondary and four years of upper secondary;	38,613[19]
RMI	2 years of ECCE, 8 years of elementary education, and 4 years of secondary;	14,863[20]
Samoa	2 years of ECCE, 8 years of elementary education, and 5 years of secondary;	63,817[21]
Solomon Islands	1 year of pre-primary, 6 years of elementary, 3 years of lower secondary, and 4 years of senior secondary;	217,447[22]
Tonga	2 years of early childhood education, an 8-year basic education cycle, consisting of 6 years of primary education and the first 2 years of secondary education, which is divided into 4 years of lower secondary and 3 years of upper secondary;	44,767[23]
Tuvalu	1 year of early childhood care, 8 years of primary and 5 years of secondary;	3,082[24]

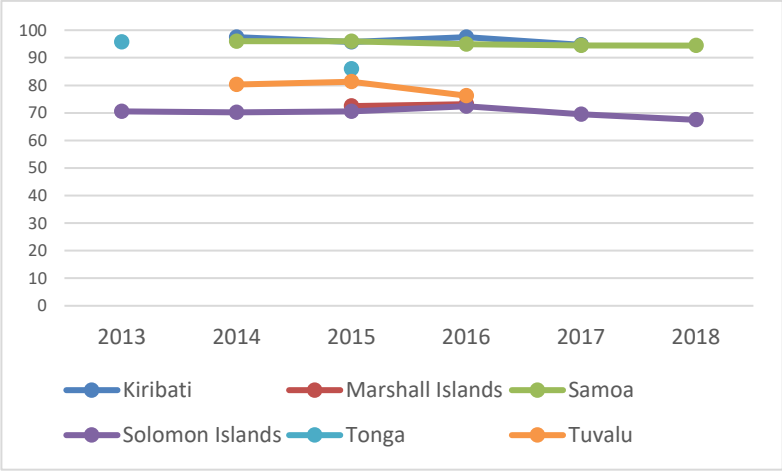
[14] A list of all the acronyms such as PacREF is found on Page 3 of the Program Document, Part 1, which is useful.
[15] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva.
[16] Non-public schools in the Pacific include community and faith-based schools that are subsidized by the government in terms of teacher training and the supply and payment of teacher salaries. More information about non-public schools is available on Page 9 of the Program Document (Part I).
[17] Program Document (Part I), page 9
[18] Number of students covers enrolments from ECCE to Upper Secondary education level.
[19] Kiribati EMIS (2019).
[20] Ministry of Education, Sports and Training of Republic of Marshall Islands (2014).
[21] Samoa Application Form for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding (2020).
[22] Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Government of the Solomon Islands (2018). Performance Assessment Report.
[23] UIS (2020).
[24] Tuvalu Education Statistics at a Glance (2016)

1.2.1. Equity:

Though there has been progress, some of the Pacific SIDS have not yet achieved universal primary education or full participation to pre-primary and secondary education. While the majority of Pacific children benefit from some form of early childhood education (ECE), the percentage of children attending at least one-year of pre-primary varies across the region. The percentage ranges from 100 percent or more in Tonga and Tuvalu to about 70-60 percent in Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and Solomon Islands, and drops to less than 40 percent in Samoa. The GPE-6 recognize the importance of ECE and have updated policies, but few possess the resources to finance universal ECE participation.

Primary completion rates are mostly high in the GPE-6, due in part to automatic promotion policies. Gross Intake Ratios (GIR) to the last grade of primary are at or above 100 percent in Tonga, Samoa, and Kiribati, while the Marshall Islands has the lowest rate at 71 percent (Table 3). Net Enrollment Rates for primary, however, show a decreasing trend for the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu,[25] although the reasons behind these drops remain unclear (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Net Enrollment rates for primary education



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2020

Table 3: Gross Intake Ratio (GIR) to last grade in primary

Kiribati	100%	(G6, 2016)
RMI	71%	(G6, 2016)
Samoa	105%	(G8, 2017)
Solomon Islands	87%	(G6, 2018)
Tonga	116%	(G6, 2013)
Tuvalu	79% [26]	(G8, 2018)

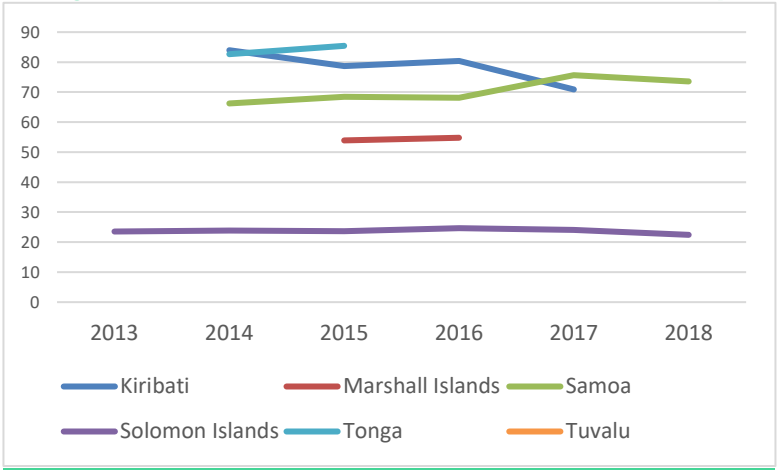
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2020

[25] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva.
[26] Despite this figure at UIS, Tuvalu MEYS confirmed to the Secretariat on October 13, 2020 that Gross Intake Rate to Grade 8 in 2017 was 92.8%.

Enrollment and completion rates are significantly lower for secondary education. Although data is not available for all countries, NERs for lower secondary range from about 85 percent in Tonga to 21 percent in the Solomon Islands (Figure 2). Whereas Kiribati and Tonga have among the highest lower secondary completion rates at 81 percent and 97 percent respectively, upper secondary completion rates drop to 18 percent and 46 percent respectively. Several factors are associated with lower access and retention at the secondary level, including lack of infrastructure and limited places in schools particularly in remote islands, examination-based barriers to secondary enrollment, and too few post-primary and post-lower secondary options for learning, including technical and vocational education[27]. Pacific education ministers note that Pacific education systems must establish and adequately resource new learning pathways through ECE to secondary education and to work related skills training[28].

With regards to gender, girls tend to fare better than boys in terms of access. For instance, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Primary Completion in Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu is 1.03, 1.03, 1.05, and 1.1 respectively.[29] The GPI for Secondary Completion is much wider at 1.46 in Kiribati and 1.53 in Samoa[30].

Figure 2: Net enrollment rates for Lower Secondary



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2020

Expanding early intervention and education of children with disabilities is one of the goals of the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016 – 2025. This has also been one of the focus areas of the regional education framework. Countries have gradually been making efforts for the expansion. For example, Kiribati increased the proportion of children with disabilities in total student enrolment in primary and lower secondary education from 2.2 percent and 1.3 percent in 2016 to 3.8 percent and 4.3 percent in 2019.

1.2.2. Learning outcomes:

[27] Program Document (Part I), page 6.
[28] Program Document (Part I), page 7.
[29] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva.
[30] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva.

The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) shows significant improvements in literacy and numeracy from 2015 to 2018. In literacy, nearly 60 percent of Year 6 students met the regional literacy proficiency levels compared to less than 50 percent in 2015. Similarly, for numeracy, about 80 percent of Year 6 students met the regional numeracy standards compared to 60 percent in 2015. Overall, results were higher for math than literacy and students struggled most with critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Girls outperformed boys, particularly in literacy where they score 16 percentage points higher than their male peers.[31] Results also varied significantly across the region. For instance, only 35 percent of Year 6 students met proficiency levels for literacy in Tonga in comparison to 60 percent across the region.

School leaders across the Pacific claim the following factors as barriers to student learning: 1) shortages of instructional materials, 2) shortages of teachers, 3) underqualified teachers, and 4) teacher absenteeism[32], which are also linked with efficiency issues mentioned below.

1.2.3. Efficiency:

One of the key common challenges identified by the education ministers in 2018 and the Pacific's Heads of the Education Systems (PHES) in 2019 is the system efficiency[33]. This is obvious from the large gaps between the primary and secondary completion rates, presented in the section of equity. The percentage of out of school children for primary education varies across countries, ranging from 19 percent in the Marshall Islands, 8 percent in the Solomon Islands, and less than 2.5 percent in Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu.[34]

Overall, teacher allocation is deemed adequate in the region, as the pupil-teacher ratio in primary education across the region is around 30[35], though it would vary significantly as per the location. With regards to availability of trained teachers, there is significant variation by country. For example, the percentages of trained teachers in primary school are, respectively, 80, 72 and 65 for Tuvalu, Kiribati and Solomon Islands, while this figure is 91 percent in Tonga. This shows that most teachers across the Pacific have received at least the minimum required amount of formal pedagogical teacher training, either pre-service and/or in-service. Additionally, at the primary level, the percentage of trained teachers is higher than at the secondary level[36]. Nevertheless, although challenges still remain, most countries have reported an increase in the

[31] EQAP (2019). Pacific Literacy & Numeracy Assessment 2018: Regional Report. Pacific Community: Suva.
[32] EQAP (2019). Pacific Literacy & Numeracy Assessment 2018: Regional Report. Pacific Community: Suva.
[33] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva. Page 2.
[34] Program Document (Part I), Page 8.
[35] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva. Page 26.
[36] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva. Page 29.

number of trained and qualified teachers at both levels[37]. In four countries with available data, more than 80 percent of primary teachers were qualified and between 65 percent and 90 percent were trained. [38]

1.2.4. Regional Education Framework and Monitoring of Sector Performance in the Region:

Since 2001, Pacific Ministers of Education have regularly met at the Forum of Education Ministers Meeting (FEdMM) to address common challenges and develop regional education frameworks to guide cooperation and collaboration in the sector. Over the past two decades, the FEdMM has become an effective platform for regional policy dialogue on education issues. It has enabled the Pacific islands to devise common strategies for improving equitable education, particularly in areas where working together would produce better outcomes than working apart. To date, three regional frameworks have been endorsed by FEdMM. The Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) in 2001 set out a vision for basic education in the Pacific, reaffirming its commitment to the Dakar Framework for Action and the six EFA goals. A revised regional agenda was adopted in 2009, known as the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF). The initiatives implemented as part of these efforts have leveraged economies of scale to develop tools and regional goods, which have helped harmonize efforts and produce data to further inform the development of the sector.[39]

With educational quality still low within the region, a more comprehensive longer-term framework was adopted in 2018, namely **the Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018-2030**: **Moving Towards Education 2030 (PacREF).** The PacREF aims to "raise the quality of education across the Pacific to enhance learners' education outcomes, and to produce high quality graduates who are able to contribute economically and socially to their communities," in alignment with the SDGs. This twelve-year framework is operationalized by the PacREF Program which is divided into three four-year phases[40]. In its first phase, the PacREF Program will focus on the development of regional tools and services (called Regional Goods: RG) that can be contextualized at the national level as well as monitoring education progress throughout the region. All the fifteen Pacific island countries[41] participate in the PacREF Program to develop RGs

[37] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva. Pages 7, 10, 13 and 16.
[38] EQAP (2020). The Status of Pacific Education 2020. Pacific Community: Suva.
[39] Key regional initiatives from FBEAP and PEDF include: the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), the Pacific Regional Qualifications and Standards (PRQS), the Pacific Benchmarking for Education Results (PaBER), the Regional Mechanism for Training of Education Policy and Planning; and the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education (PRC4ECCE).
[40] PacREF 2018-2030, Page 12.
[41] Namely, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu

through the facilitation of five regional implementation agencies (IAs)[42]. The Program's activities are articulated in an annually updated Implementation Rolling Plan (IRP) which covers four years. The Program is accompanied by the PacREF Monitoring, Evaluation and learning Plan (MEL Plan).

As for the governance, overall responsibility for the PacREF rests with the Forum Education Ministers through the FEdMM. Reporting to the FedMM, the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) has the responsibility of ensuring that the PacREF Programme is implemented as intended. The PHES meets every other year to review the PacREF Program and to review and approve proposed updates of the PacREF's IRPs. The PHES is represented by the PacREF Steering Committee (SC)[43], consisting of their five members, on all PacREF policy and programming matters in between PHES meetings. The PacREF Program is implemented by the IAs which are coordinated through the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP)'s Human Resource Working Group (HRD WG)[44]. The CROP HRD WG also includes development partners such as Australia, New Zealand, Asian Development Bank and World Bank. It was decided in September 2020 that a CSO Forum is established as part of this governance structure[45]. Activities of the PacREF SC and the CROP HRD WG are supported by the PacREF Facilitating Unit (PFU) embedded in the University of South Pacific, directly under its Vice Chancellor.

The Regional Education Group (equivalent to the LEG) currently consists of representatives from the GPE-6, the PacREF SC, and the CROP HRD WG, supported by the PFU and the Coordinating Agency which is currently assumed by New Zealand.

The PacREF implementation is monitored at three levels[46]: Level 1, carried out by the PFU, focuses on day-to-day compliance with the IRP and its partnership agreements; Level 2, carried out by the Pacific Community (SPC)'s Education Quality Assessment Program (EQAP), deals with formative assessment and is informed by the guiding principles of the PacREF strategy; and Level 3, led by the EQAP, will measure system performance against Key Performance Indicators.

High-level monitoring and evaluation will also be completed by the EQAP who will report to the PHES via the SC and the LEG. EQAP, assisted by the PFU, will organize regular fora for reviewing

[42] Namely, The Pacific Community's Education Quality Assessment Programme (EQAP), the University of the South Pacific (through its School of Education (SoE), Institute of Education (IoE) and Technical and Further Education [TAFE]), UNICEF, UNESCO and the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC).
[43] Members of PacREF Steering Committee (SC) rotate every two years and currently include Papua New Guinea (Melanesian sub-region), Palau (Micronesian sub-region), Niue (Polynesian sub-region), Kiribati (Smaller Island States), and Vanuatu (larger island states).
[44] PacREF 2018-2030, Page 17-18.
[45] Program Document (Part I), Page 27
[46] Details of program monitoring can be found in Pacific Regional Education Framework Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan with Theory of Change (Annex 8 of the Program Document).

sector progress, sharing lessons learned and best practices, and promoting knowledge exchange among countries. This will be expected to function as regional Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs)[47].

2. FIXED PART REQUIREMENTS

The Guidelines for Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grants outline how the GPE Operating Model adapts to SIDS' regional applications[48]. Table 4 below summarizes the main adjustments.

Table 4: Summary of GPE Operating Model requirements applied to Regional ESPIGs[49]

	Adaptations applied to Regional ESPIGs
Total allocation	• SIDS can consolidate their MCAs into a total allocation to support the implementation of a regional ESP. This would include countries that may not be eligible for GPE resources. Flexibility is left for the GPE-eligible countries to decide whether to fully pool their resources under the regional ESP or earmark them country-by-country. However, the regional ESP should make clear that resources and support will be fairly targeted towards those countries in the region that are least developed (poverty criteria), have lower education results (education vulnerability) and are in situations of fragility.
Requirement 1: Credible, endorsed, regional Education Plan (REP)	• Full ESA is not required if regional ESP is evidence-based. • Regional ESP does not have to cover all education subsectors or thematic areas within a subsector, instead it can be tailored according to context. • Independent appraisal is not required, but it is sufficient for it to be appraised by development partners in the regional education group in a simplified manner.
Requirement 2: Evidence of commitment to the ESP and its financing.	• Instead of compliance with GPE domestic financing benchmarks, Regional ESPs should provide a clear financing framework that reflects resources devoted to the education sector by regional organizations, development partners, and/or GPE member states. • Percentage of total government expenditures and percentage of recurrent government expenditures (excluding debt service) allocated to education in each of the GPE member states should still be provided.

[47] Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018-2030: Moving Towards Education 2030, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning section, Page 18.

[48] Guidelines for Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (June 2020), pages 10, 11 and 21-23.

[49] Adapted from Annex 2 of the Guidelines for Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (June 2020). The complete version of this annex is available in pages 21-23 of the regional guidelines.

Requirement 3: Availability of data (or strategy to obtain data)	• Availability of data focuses on the regional ESP and regional ESA instead of on individual countries. • However, data should be provided, for each GPE grant eligible country, on the types of learning assessments used and years carried out, as well as plans for future assessments, frequency, and intended uses.
Variable Part	• Not applied to regional applications.

2.1. Requirement 1: A credible, endorsed Education Sector Plan (ESP)

The PacREF is the Pacific Islands' 12-year Regional Education Sector Plan, as mentioned above, that was developed with ESPDG support and as part of a highly participative process. It covers the entire education sector from ECCE to tertiary education in formal and non-formal settings and sets out 6 Guiding Principles and four key policy areas to "deliver sustainable, affordable and high-quality education goods and services to Pacific countries" (Table 5). The PacREF is operationalized through an annually updated IRP. The current IRP covers 2020-2023 and includes costs and activities for that period. The IRP was discussed and approved by the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) in April 2019 and updated in October 2020.

Table 5: PacREF Guiding Principles and Key Policy Areas

6 Guiding Principles	4 Key Policy Areas
1. Regionalism and mutually beneficial partnerships 2. Application of evidence to policy and practice 3. Efficiency in the use of resources 4. Equity in access and opportunity 5. High quality and relevant inputs 6. Sustainable and high-quality outcomes	1. Quality and Relevance; 2. Learning Pathways; 3. Student Outcomes and Wellbeing; and 4. The Teaching Profession

Although Regional Education Sector Plans are not required to undergo an appraisal independently[50], New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade adapted the methodologies outlined in the ESP appraisal guidelines to appraise the PacREF and its 2019-2022 IRP. The final Appraisal Report was delivered in February 2020, and it identified 13 recommendations, mainly related to budgeting, risk analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and operationalization of equity policies. The PFU and the five Implementing Agencies (IAs) responded to these recommendations and developed a second IRP covering 2020 – 23, which was endorsed by the PacREF Steering Committee representing the PHES, and its development

[50] According to the Guidelines for Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (June 2020), Page 10, Regional Applications are exempt of an Independent Appraisal applied to Regional ESPs. [51] Program Document (Part II), Annex 1: PacREF within the context of Pacific regionalism, Pages 5-7.

partners (CROP HRD WG) on May 15, 2020. The PacREF package, including its IRP, was submitted to the Secretariat on June 30 with the endorsement from development partners, and re-submitted on October 8, 2020 after reflecting on the QAR II report's recommendations.

The process for the development of the PacREF and its IRP was led by a Small Working Group (SWG) of the Pacific Heads of the Education Systems (PHES) composed of Fiji, Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Palau and Solomon Islands. This SWG later engaged in broader consultations with the rest of the PHES and the Forum of Education Minister's Meeting (FEdMM), who ultimately approved the PacREF and its IRP[51]. Similarly, DPs and IAs were involved in the development of the IRP and the PacREF Program Document and its annexes.

Conclusion: ***The Secretariat deems that Requirement 1 is met.***

2.2. Requirement 2: Evidence of commitment to ESP or TEP and its financing.

The regional ESPIG guidelines note that while it is encouraged that all ESPIG-eligible countries meet all the requirements, not meeting a requirement in one or more states should not lead to withholding the support for the whole regional ESPIG as the GPE benchmark may not be relevant to the demographics and particular circumstances of SIDS[52]. Thus, Requirement 2 is not strictly applied to this regional ESPIG application. The guidelines rather expect to identify: 1) if the regional plan provides a clear financing framework that reflects the financial resources devoted to support the implementation of the regional plan by the regional organizations, development partners, and/or governments of the participating countries, and 2) the status of the share of education expenditures against total government expenditures and (if primary education has not been achieved) the share of recurrent primary education expenditures against total education expenditures in each of the countries participating in the regional ESPIG. This section will review these two aspects.

1) Financial commitment to implement the PacREF

While the PacREF Program is designed as an externally funded program, it is important to note that the governments of the countries which participate in the PacREF also finance the regional implementing agencies of the PacREF Program directly or indirectly[53]. Only the costs for technical assistance to develop the Regional Goods produced by the PacREF Program are

[51] Program Document (Part II), Annex 1: PacREF within the context of Pacific regionalism, Pages 5-7.
[52] Guidelines for Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (June 2020), Page 11
[53] ESPIG Application Form, Page 8-9.

indicated in the PacREF financial framework. The Pacific governments also finance operationalization of these RGs in their countries[54].

To date, implementation of Phase 1 of the Program has been financed by regional implementing agencies with financial contribution from the Pacific countries, New Zealand (MFAT) and Australia (DFAT)[55]. From 2021, further financial commitments from the regional IAs and New Zealand totaling US$ 4.6 million against the total requirement of US$ 19 million are secured.[56]

Major interventions by development partners to the region and the GPE-6 are summarized in Annex 1.

2) National financial data of countries participating in this regional ESPIG

Documentation submitted to the GPE Secretariat in May 2020 shows that domestic financing to education varies significantly by country (Table 6). In 2019, the share of education expenditure of the total public expenditure ranged from 12.9 percent in Tuvalu to 39.7 percent in Solomon Islands. Although five out of the six countries are below the 20 percent benchmark, all the five countries project an increase in education expenditures.

Table 7 below shows the share of recurrent primary education expenditures of the total education expenditures in the GPE-6 countries. It is noted that although RMI and Solomon Islands, among the GPE-6, have not achieved Universal Primary Education, their allocation to primary education remains below the 45 percent benchmark. Out of the GPE-6, Solomon Islands thus has the highest overall allocation to education, but the lowest share of that allocation going to primary. This is due to a relatively high level of spending on higher education, for scholarships.

Table 6: Share of Education Expenditures in total public expenditures (recurrent and capital)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budget	Projection	Projection	Projection
Kiribati	15.9%	16.8%	16.0%	15.9%	16.6%	17.2%	17.6%
RMI	22.1%	20.8%	18.4%	20.9%	21.7%	22.1%	22.4%
Samoa	19.5%	19.7%	19.7%	19.8%	20.5%	21.3%	22.2%
Solomon Islands	44.2%	41.8%	39.7%	41.0%	41.0%	41.0%	41.0%
Tonga	20.0%	19.0%	15.4%	15.6%	17.3%	19.1%	21.2%
Tuvalu	15.8%	18.5%	12.9%	14.5%	15.3%	16.1%	16.9%

Source: National Education budget documents and data provided to the PacREF PFU, April 2020

[54] ESPIG Application Form, Page 9.
[55] Program Document (Part I), Page 30.
[56] ESPIG Application Form, Page 16.

Table 7: Share of primary education expenditures in total education expenditures (recurrent)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budget	Projection	Projection	Projection
Kiribati	40.0%	31.0%	38.0%	39.7%	39.0%	40.1%	40.5%
RMI	30.0%	30.0%	36.0%	30.0%	30.0%	31.0%	31.0%
Samoa	33.0%	36.0%	39%	37.3%	37.3%	37.2%	37.2%
Solomon Islands	33.0%	23.0%	23.0%	25.0%	25.2%	25.8%	26.4%
Tonga	39.5%	42.0%	34.0%	35.0%	37.0%	40.0%	42.0%
Tuvalu	33.8%	32.9%	32.1%	47.9%	44.0%	42.0%	40.1%

Source: National Education budget documents and data provided to the PacREF PFU, April 2020

The program document notes[57] that the PFU is currently in discussion with the ADB, the World Bank and the Institute of Education (IoE) at USP as to how best to undertake a "Financing of Education in the Pacific" study which would provide a deeper understanding of the political economy of education financing across the region. Once completed, appropriate education financing would be discussed through the FEdMM mechanism.

Conclusion: ***Strong commitment to finance the PacREF implementation is observed both in the participating countries and from the development partners. It is expected that policy dialogue around appropriate education financing will be regularly conducted among the PacREF participating countries, as intended by the PFU.***

2.3. Requirement 3: Availability of Data.

Although a full Education Sector Analysis is not required for the development of a regional ESP, GPE's Regional ESPIG guidelines recommend that regional strategies are evidence-based.[58] In the case of the Pacific, both the PacREF and the IRP are based on a situational analysis of the education sector in the region, as well as in each member country. The most relevant studies include: 1) The Status of Education in the Pacific report, conducted by the Pacific Community in April 2017 and updated in May 2020, and 2) the Assessment of the Effectiveness and Impact of the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) 2009 - 2015, conducted by UNESCO in 2017 with ESPDG support.

In terms of data, all the GPE-6 countries have made progress in data collection, analysis and management with five out of the six countries having functional Education Management

[57] Page 13

[58] Guidelines for Regional Education Sector Program Implementation Grants (June 2020), Page 10.

Information Systems (EMIS) in place. Moreover, all GPE-6 countries publish financial data and/or indicators either in their annual reports or in their education statistics digests. However, challenges still remain. For example, Statistics Education Digests publish data that is disaggregated by gender but not by socioeconomic status, although it may be possible to disaggregate education statistics by wealth index using microdata from expenditure surveys. Similarly, availability of data on children with disabilities and other dimensions of vulnerability also varies across countries.

Differences exist in the regularity of reporting to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) (Table 8). On average, GPE-6 are reporting between 4-7 core education indicators out of 12 tracked by GPE, and some countries like Tonga have not reported since 2015. Technical assistance provided through the regional ESPIG is expected to help foster more regular and consistent UIS reporting in the future.

Table 8: Latest reporting year to UIS and number of core indicators reported

Country	Latest reporting year to UIS	Number of indicators reported out of 12 core indicators tracked by GPE[59]
Kiribati	2017	6/12
Marshall Islands	2016	4/12
Samoa	2018	6/12
Solomon Islands	2018	7/12
Tonga	2015	5/12
Tuvalu	2018	7/12

In terms of a system to monitor learning outcomes, both regional and national assessments exist[60]. EQAP conducts the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) every three years across the 15 Pacific countries. PILNA is applied in Grades 4 and 6 and will be extended to Grade 8, as established in the PacREF. This expansion will be financed by the proposed ESPIG.

Conclusion: ***The Secretariat deems that Requirement 3 is met. However, the Secretariat also recommends GPC to request a report-back on the countries' reporting of education statistics to UIS.***

[59] These are the indicators currently published on UIS website. However, the Regional ESPIG Application Form notes that Samoa and Tuvalu have already submitted data to UIS for the 2019 school year, while Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands were expected to submit data by the end of June 2020.
[60] All GPE-6 countries have national learning assessments. These are available on Page 12 of the Application Form.

3. ESPIG

3.1 ESPIG DESCRIPTION

This is the first regional ESPIG for the Pacific Region. In fact, it is also the first time that any of the GPE-6 countries utilize their MCAs, with their GPE membership granted in October 2020.

The requested grant amount of US$ 14,997,510 is within the approved combined Maximum Country Allocation of US$ 15 million, which consists of US$ 2.5 million from each of the GPE-6. The ESPIG is to co-finance the PacREF Program together with the New Zealand MFAT, the PacREF Implementing Agencies and other development partners. The ADB, as the Grant Agent for this ESPIG, decided to treat this ESPIG as additional financing to ADB's existing technical assistance project[61].

This ESPIG's duration is 31.5 months and will support the ongoing PacREF Program implementation. It will be instrumental for the PacREF Program as it will cover 85 percent of the total costs of the program.

The Program's key products to be delivered will entail the design/upgrading/strengthening/ of an integrated set of Regional Goods, Services and Standards (RGs) that are (i) tested and contextualized to reflect the prevailing circumstances in each participating country's education system, and (ii) subsequently embedded in those systems as routine practices. IAs will provide technical support to countries for the development and implementation of these tools and services, while countries are expected to make the best use of them to improve their national education systems, as well as enhance Pacific regionalism.

The main vision of the PacREF and its Program is to equitably raise the quality of schooling and student learning outcomes across the Pacific. The four main Policy Areas of the program include:

1) **Quality and Relevance.** This policy area aims at increasing the quality and relevance of education at all levels by providing all learners with a safe and supportive environment with high-quality, meaningful, valuable, inclusive and forward-looking learning opportunities. RGs to be delivered by this policy area include: (i) identified and agreed

[61] Strengthening Education in the Pacific Region: TA 9645-REG. This project was approved by ADB on November 29, 2018 and to be completed on December 31, 2023. The project has three main outputs: (i) Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) implementation supported; (ii) regional repository and learning management platform for open, distance, and flexible learning supported; and (iii) small assessments, studies, and exchanges to expand knowledge development and program development supported. This is currently financed by ADB (US$ 750,000), the Republic of Korea (US$ 1 million). The Program Development Grant for the regional ESPIG application (US$ 389,875) is also administered through this project. New Zealand is to add US$ 2,756,034 to this project as well. More information on the parent technical assistance project is available on Page 31 of the Program Document (Part I).

definition of non-cognitive skills; (ii) needs assessment on the status of the quality of learning environments; and (iii) Quality assurance frameworks for school learning environments.

2) **Learning Pathways.** This policy area seeks to ensure that learners' needs are met by providing access to a broad range of programs, delivery modalities and seamless pathways to allow them to fulfill their maximum potential. RGs to be delivered by this policy area include: (i) guidelines for quality ECE, tools for governance, management, quality assurance and financing for ECE program development; (ii) framework for the domains of home to school transition, tools and processes to identify ways to improve home to school transitions; (iii) framework for identifying learning pathways from ECE to adulthood; (iv) pacific skills portal[62]; and (v) Pacific Skills Dialogue/Summit.
3) **Student outcomes.** The purpose of this policy area is that all learners achieve their maximum potential by acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attributes to enable them to successfully contribute to their families, communities and nation. RGs to be delivered by this policy area include: (i) Waka Learning Hub utilized by in-service teachers to improve literacy and numeracy instruction; (ii) Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (primary)[63]; and (iii) Lower secondary assessment aligned with SDG4.1.1
4) **Teacher professionalism.** This policy goal seeks that the teaching profession is supported and empowered through opportunities for continuous development, shared understanding and accountability. It aims at developing competent, qualified and certified teachers and school leaders who are fully supported, engaged, effective and committed to their students. RGs to be delivered by this policy area include: (i) Teacher competency standards; (ii) Accreditation and recognition of teacher education programs; (iii) Standards and qualifications in school leadership; and (iv) Framework for continuous professional development.

Table 9: ESPIG Components and Costs (US$)

	GPE	% of total GPE	MFAT	IAs	Other DPs	Total Amount	% of total
Total MCA: US$ 15 million							
1 Quality and Relevance	2,985,838	20%	200,343	85,454	5,000	3,276,635	16.6%
2 Learning Pathways	1,820,714	12%	315,915	281,944	0	2,418,573	12.2%
3 Student outcomes and wellbeing	5,021,695	33%	359,946	1,392,894	73,138	6,847,673	34.8%

[62] This is not supported by the ESPIG.
[63] This is not supported by the ESPIG.

4	**Teacher professionalism**	2,850,165	19%	779,513	249,007	47,142	3,925,827	20%
5	**PFU and M&E**	1,774,386	12%	256,729	638,348	0	2,669,463	13.6%
	Sub-total of Components	14,452,799	96%	1,912,446	2,647,647	125,280	19,138,171	98%
Grant Agent's Implementation Support Costs*		544,711	4%	0	0	0	544,711	2.8%
GRAND TOTAL (with Grant Agent's Implementation Support Costs)		14,997,510	100	1,912,446	2,647,647	125,280	19,682,882	100%
	Agency Fees**	749,875.50						

* Include Grant Agent's direct costs, such as Program Management, Administrative and other direct implementation costs.

** Agency Fee is not included in the MCA and is calculated as percentage rate (agreed with each GA) from the total grant amount.

These RGs are produced by the participating countries with support from the following five IAs: The Pacific Community's Education Quality Assessment Programme (EQAP), the University of the South Pacific (through its School of Education (SoE), Institute of Education (IoE) and Technical and Further Education [TAFE]), UNICEF, UNESCO and the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). Their utilization of the ESPIG is indicated in Table 10, which does not include APTC as their activities are directly funded by Australia.

Table 10: ESPIG Utilization by IAs (US$)

		EQAP	UNESCO	UNICEF	USP	Total
1	**Quality and Relevance**	-	813,401	1,879,251	293,186	2,985,838
2	**Learning Pathways**	361,302	-	1,375,462	83,950	1,820,714
3	**Student outcomes and wellbeing**	1,997,352	1,871,420	558,643	594,280	5,021,695
4	**Teacher professionalism**	802,321	-	334,860	1,712,984	2,850,165
5	**PFU and M&E**	417,450	-	-	1,356,936	1,774,386
	Percentage	24.8%	18.6%	28.7%	28.0%	100%
	Total	3,578,425	2,684,821	4,148,216	4,041,337	14,452,799

(calculated by the Secretariat based on the IAs' budget information)

Though all the fifteen Pacific countries will benefit from the regional goods and services delivered by this ESPIG, as allowed by this regional approach, the program ensures that the GPE-6 are "fairly targeted" in two ways. First, as the IRP identifies regional, multi-country, single-country or few countries activities, activities benefitting the GPE-6 will be carried out in Stage 1 of the ESPIG implementation[64]. Thus, activities benefitting the rest of the countries will be largely implemented in Stage 2. Second, in view of the activities participated by the countries and their

[64] Program Document (Part I), Page 19.

costs, it is seen that 70 percent of the ESPIG will be assigned to the GPE-6, while the remaining 30 percent will be assigned to the rest of the participating countries[65], as seen in Table 11[66].

Table 11: ESPIG allocation by Country (US$)

		GPE-6	Other countries	Percentage of GPE-6
1	**Quality and Relevance**	2,227,828	758,010	**75%**
2	**Learning Pathways**	1,305,222	515,492	**72%**
3	**Student outcomes and wellbeing**	3,348,695	1,673,000	**67%**
4	**Teacher professionalism**	2,023,228	826,937	**71%**
5	**PFU and M&E**	1,158,710	615,676	**65%**
	Total	10,063,683	4,389,115	**70%**

(Program Document Part III p.5)

3.2 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM DOCUMENT

The final application reflects a significant amount of work undertaken by the GA, the PFU, the Implementing Agencies and the PacREF participating countries to incorporate QAR II recommendations, which emphasized mainly the following issues: (i) strengthening the Theory of Change of the program to better reflect the causal linkages between supported activities, outputs, and expected outcomes at both the regional and national level; (ii) more clearly accounting for the inherent risk of under-utilization of regional goods, especially in GPE-6 countries; and (iii) improving CSO engagement in program implementation and monitoring, as they did not formally participate in the Regional LEG at the time of QAR II.

The resulting program is aligned with GPE strategic Goal 1: Improved and more equitable learning outcomes, Goal 2: Increased equity, gender equality and Goal 3: Effective and efficient Education Systems. Furthermore, the program has been found to meet all the 7 Program Quality Standards (see Annex 2).

Program Design. The program pursues the policy areas outlined in the PacREF and responds to critical sector challenges outlined in the more recent 2020 Status of Pacific Education Report for the GPE-6 countries. Activities in the PacREF Program address key issues such as broadening access to quality ECD, strengthening inclusion, learner centered pedagogy, and the monitoring of student achievement in basic education, as well as enhancing teacher competencies and school leadership. Through the support of IAs, it is expected that critical knowledge gaps with

[65] Pages 6-12 of the Program Document (Part III) provides a detailed description of the methodology for determining indicative budget distributions for GPE ESPIG funds.
[66] The allocation by individual 15 countries is also available on p.5 of the Program Document Part 3.

respect to curriculum relevance, student assessment, school readiness, and system effectiveness will be filled. Additionally, at the national level technical support on improving data quality and EMIS will strengthen the evidence-base for ongoing programmatic and policy decisions. The program will also contribute to strengthening the capacity of the regional IAs, so that they can provide higher quality support services to Pacific countries. The project design is evidence-based and contains appropriate references to the relevant literature, data, documents and reports. Finally, although the program will deliver RGs that will benefit the 15 countries in the Pacific Region, it also details how the intervention will prioritize the GPE-6 countries that pooled their funds into this regional application, by placing them in the first of two stages on activity implementation.

Program Budget. The application presents detailed budgets for each IA structured by policy area, output and activity. The Program also presents the costs per policy area, intermediate outcome and activity by funding source. Therefore, program costs are deemed reasonable. Additionally, per feedback provided by the Secretariat, the program document provides a detailed description of how the GPE-6 will be prioritized, even though this grant will fund the delivery of RGs for all the 15 PacREF countries – 70 percent of the ESPIG funds will be allocated to the GPE-6[67]. Detailed GA implementation support costs are also presented as part of the application package. Projected annual disbursements by IA are also presented. The ESPIG will fund US$541,711 for GA implementation support costs or 3.6 percent of the total requested amount. The GA has worked diligently to ensure that overhead costs of implementing agencies are kept to a minimum.

M&E. The program includes a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan comprised of a three-level strategy for monitoring, evaluation and learning with clear roles and responsibilities for monitoring and reporting tasks. This MEL plan constitutes the monitoring framework for the overarching PacREF, and it includes key performance indicators to measure progress on program interventions. In particular, indicators measure enhanced coordination, collaboration and communication among IAs, CSOs and PacREF governance, as well as improved stakeholder management[68]. The Results Framework is included in the MEL plan and it entails outputs and expected outcomes that are in line with the PacREF.

Fiduciary, Implementation Arrangements, and Readiness. PacREF will be implemented by five regional IAs that will support the development of tools and provide services to national education systems as established by the PacREF. Therefore, they are held accountable for

[67] Program Document (Part III), Page 6.
[68] Program Document (Part II). Results Framework, p. 138-139.

adequate delivery. The Program document sufficiently describes the responsibilities of the PFU and of each IA for fiduciary management, as well as the ADB's support through fiduciary oversight and technical assistance. It also provides a comprehensive description of financial management, procurement and auditing arrangements. Moreover, since no GPE funds will be supporting for profit provision of core education services or not for profit non-state provision of core education services, this program is aligned with GPE's Private Sector Strategy.

Risk Identification and Mitigation Measures. The Program Document adequately identifies both relevant risks and their adequate mitigation and preventative measures. It is worth mentioning that implementation capacity risks both on the side of the IAs and of the national education systems have also been identified, and that mitigation measures include the strengthening of the partnerships between the ministry and those providing technical assistance and developing clear timelines, so that IAs can effectively work collaboratively[69]. Furthermore, as no civil works are planned as part of this project, no significant environmental risks are expected as a result of program activities.

Sustainability. The program has been designed to be sustainable, as it will strengthen the IAs' capacity to respond in a coordinated way to cross-cutting challenges faced by the education systems in the region. At the national level, emphasis on improved planning, policy development, and school leadership capacities should aid in sustaining and advancing gains made as through the development and contextualization of regional goods and services. Further, the emphasis on South-south collaboration offer sustainable regional mechanisms for sharing and capacity development at system and school levels. With regard to financial sustainability, since the regional goods are already included in the business plan of the IAs, region ministers and heads of education systems who steer the programming of these IAs forward will ensure the continuity of the interventions through their financial resources.

Aid Effectiveness. The Secretariat's assessment has found that the program is aligned with the main criteria of aid effectiveness. In this sense, the program uses regional systems, which is appropriate for a regional program in order to respond to key shared developmental challenges of the Pacific Islands countries. At the same time, planning systems at the national level are expected to help contextualize and embed regional goods. Endorsements of the program by the Pacific Human Resources Development Working Group (CROP HRD WG), representatives from GPE-6 countries, DPs, and the IAs have also been secured. Moreover, it is noteworthy that civil society organizations in the region agreed to establish a CSO forum as part of the PacREF

[69] Program Document (Part II), Risk Register, p. 142.

governance structure, which was accepted by the regional LEG. It is expected that more voices from Civil Society will be reflected in PacREF implementation.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the context of the Pacific Islands, the Secretariat finds that the proposed grant application is relevant and well-aligned with the PacREF and its program. The Secretariat recommends the Grants and Performance Committee (GPC) to consider the three funding model requirements as met and to approve the regional ESPIG application.

The Secretariat also recommends that GPC requests the following report-backs to be included in the grant annual report:

- Progress made towards data collection and management, especially data on gender and children with disabilities, as well as for UIS reporting during the time of program implementation; and
- Outcomes of the planned study ""Financing of Education in the Pacific" and subsequent policy dialogue through the routine FEdMM mechanism.