

**Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF)
Programme Document Package**

[Part 1: The Programme Document](#)

**Application for a Global Partnership for Education
Regional Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant**

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APTCT	Australia-Pacific Technical Coalition
CA	Coordinating Agency
CPD	Continuous professional development
CROP HRD WG	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific Human Resources Development Working Group
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Government of Australia)
DP	Development Partner
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQAP	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme
ESP	Education Sector Plan
ESPIG	Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant
FBEAP	Forum Basic Education Action Plan
FEdMM	Forum Education Ministers' Meeting
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GA	Grant Agency
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HDI	Human Development Index
IAS	Implementing Agencies
IoE	Institute of Education (at the University of the South Pacific)
IRP	Implementation Rolling Plan
LEG	Local Education Group
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Government of New Zealand)
OECS	Organization of Caribbean States
PaBER	Pacific Benchmarking for Education Results
PacREF	Pacific Regional Education Framework (2019-2030)
PD	Programme Document
PEDF	Pacific Education Development Framework
PFU	PacREF Facilitating Unit
PHES	Pacific Heads of Education Systems
PHES-SWG	Pacific Heads of Education Systems-Small Working Group
PIC	Pacific Island Countries
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PILNA	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRQS	Pacific Register of Qualifications Standards
PRC4ECCE	Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QAR	Quality Assessment Review
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RGs	Regional Goods, Services and Standards
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
SC	PacREF Steering Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SoE	School of Education (at the University of the South Pacific)
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TA	Technical Assistance
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USP	University of the South Pacific

Pacific Regional Education Framework

Programme Document

1 Introduction

The Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) is a regional policy designed to equitably raise the quality of schooling and student outcomes across the Pacific. This will be achieved through a twelve-year programme that expands and improves the support provided to the region's school systems by the Pacific's regionally based education agencies. The wider PacREF Programme operationalizes the PacREF policy through a series of activities that design and test demand-responsive regional goods, services and standards (RGs) that will then be contextualised and embedded in national education systems to sustainably raise the quality of their services and establish, over time, upward trends in learning outcomes. The Programme's activities are articulated in an annually updated Implementation Rolling Plan (IRP). The first annual update of the IRP (the 2020 IRP) and the associated PacREF Monitoring, Evaluation and learning Plan (MEL Plan) were shared with GPE in June 2020.

The PacREF policy and the wider PacREF Programme are guided by the principles of Pacific regionalism. They are strategic, evidence-based, and their targets are achievable. *A detailed history of the PacREF development and Pacific regionalism is in Annex 1.* The Programme benefits 15 Pacific island countries (PICs): 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 Vanuatu¹. Throughout this document these countries are referred to as PacREF's **'participating countries'**.

The PacREF was drafted by a working group of members of the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES)², the PHES-SWG, assisted by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)³ and approved at the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting (FEEdMM) in May 2018⁴. The first IRP, for the period 2019/20-2021/22, was approved by the PHES, on behalf of their ministers, in mid-2019. The Programme is implemented by five regional Implementing Agencies (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 Coalition⁵ (APTC). *Detailed information on the five agencies can be found in Annex 2.*

This Programme Document (PD) is designed to meet the requirements of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Quality Assurance Review Phase III (QAR III is the last of three QARs required by GPE.) which assesses the readiness of the Pacific to access GPE funding to finance the PacREF Programme via a regional Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG) window. The Pacific's ESPIG application seeks USD 15

¹ All of the countries are included in the Programme, however funds for Tokelau will be sourced through alternate means due to the Grant Agent's inability to fund non-member countries.

² The Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) is a forum for Heads of Education Systems in the Pacific which was formalized by Forum Education Ministers at their meeting in Tonga in 2008. The rationale for the PHES's creation was for the group to be part of the FEEdMM agenda setting processes. As part of PacREF governance structure, they make decisions on PacREF implementation. Any changes to the PacREF Programme to be made by IAs must first be approved by PHES who meet every two years, convened by UNESCO.

³ The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) is the secretariat to the Pacific Islands Forum. It takes its mandate from the Forum Leaders (Heads of State) through their annual meetings. The Secretariat role is to ensure implementation of Leaders' decisions and to serve and is the advisory body to the Forum Leaders.

⁴ The Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEEdMM) which takes place every two years is an event in which the Pacific region's 15 education ministers, together with representatives from New Zealand and Australia, debate and determine policies that inform or direct regionwide efforts in the sector.

⁵ The APTC is funded outside of GPE funds through the Australian Government.

million via the six Pacific island countries (Kiribati, RMI, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu) that are eligible for GPE funding. Throughout this document these countries are referred to as the ‘**contributing countries**’ that have agreed to commit their GPE Maximum Country Allocations of USD 2.5 million each to finance the first Phase of the PacREF Programme. The PacREF’s Grant Agent (GA) is the ADB, its Coordinating Agent (CA) is MFAT. This PD provides information on context, the scope of Phase 1 of the Programme, how it will be managed and monitored, its costs, how it will be financed, and the risks and challenges associated with its implementation. Where appropriate, it provides the GPE with data that pertains to the six contributing countries.

2 Context

2.1 The Pacific’s Shared Challenges

Pacific people have vibrant cultures and diverse social structures and a history of resilience that draws on their understanding of the Pacific environment and on their tradition of sustainable use of resources. Unfortunately, the very nature of Pacific island life is one of vulnerability: to climate change and disasters, and to the social and economic challenges associated with small populations in remote locations. The dynamic international economic and political environment presents a challenging context for Pacific development as global events influence the Pacific’s socio-economic and political landscape and affect the rates of economic growth across the region. Life expectancy in many areas of the Pacific has increased and infant mortality rates have declined in all countries. However, poor quality education, gender inequity, increasing inequality and poverty, water and food insecurity, youth unemployment and shortages of skilled labour remain challenges. There have been successes in reducing the incidence of infectious disease across the region, but the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases is putting new strain on public health systems and finances. Ensuring that all Pacific children have access to high-quality ECE, primary and secondary education continues to be a challenge. Although the full impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Pacific will not be known for some time, it has already drastically impacted the tourism and trade sectors and has caused school closures and a high degree of additional unemployment. Pacific nations are addressing the impact of the virus assisted by their development partners (DPs).

Continually responding to challenges has strained and slowed development progress, affecting the region’s capacity to alleviate and prevent poverty, achieve sustainable development and to help its people realize their potential. The most meaningful and sustained responses to region-wide challenges have been informed by country needs and priorities and have required an understanding of context, Pacific regionalism, local political and technical leadership and, importantly, the effective alignment of DP support with national and regional efforts⁶.

2.2 Regionally Shared Shortfalls and Strengths

The PHES identified common shortfalls in system performance that could best be addressed through region-wide interventions, by drawing on national data and on national and regional project and programme documentation and reports from their development partners including the IAs, and on their experience as chief executives familiar with their ministries’ capacities. Four were prioritized in early PHES-SWG meetings:

- Pacific schooling provides too few of the region’s children and youth with relevant age-appropriate skills.
- From ECE to higher education and training, too few Pacific systems offer a range of learning options.
- Too few of the Pacific’s children and youth achieve their full potential.
- Too few of the region’s teachers and school leaders, while mostly qualified and trained, have had exposure to best practice teaching and learning.

⁶ Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2016-2020, SPC 2015.

Most Pacific children are enrolled in and attend school⁷. Evidence suggests that this is, in large part, due to the free and compulsory nature of schooling across the region and to the widely shared value placed on education that ensures that where there is access, there is participation. However, some PICs continue to face difficulty in ensuring equitable participation in schooling and training, particularly in remote and isolated areas, on outer islands, and in areas where existing socio-cultural norms (for example, those related to gender, language and disability) and poverty tend to discourage either enrolment or regular participation.

Enrollment is also affected by the disproportionate distribution of education resources. Hard-to-reach schools, and there are many across the Pacific, often face multiple geographical challenges, receive less attention from system managers, receive fewer resources, and are often in less attractive locations that do not appeal to the well-prepared and career-conscious teachers.

The majority of Pacific children benefit from some form of ECE, and the percentage that enrol in ECE in the year prior to primary education is increasing annually. ECE services vary across the region, with some governments funding ECE teachers' salaries and/or providing ECE facilities and materials, while other governments finance alternative provision and set policy and regulatory frameworks to guide non-government provision.

Primary completion rates are mostly high across the region, due in part to the automatic promotion policies that most PICs maintain being effective in retaining students and lessening drop-out between grades. Secondary completion rates are lower than those of primary education for a number of reasons, including that there are too few secondary places, examination-based barriers to enrolment and too few post-primary and post-junior secondary options for learning, including for technical and vocational education as an alternative to the more academic lines of study offered in the region's senior secondary and high schools.

The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) indicates that there have been improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes over the three-year period 2015-2018: almost two-thirds of year 6 students met the regional literacy proficiency level in 2018 compared to less than half in 2015, and eight out of ten Year 6 students were proficient in numeracy in 2018 compared to two-thirds in 2015. However, although literacy and numeracy outcomes are improving, PICs' own assessments of literacy confirm that, overall, too few Pacific children are learning to read, comprehend what they read and to write at expected levels or are able to meet their country's numeracy expectations.

Student learning assessment is not effective in many Pacific school systems. Most students in the Pacific are automatically promoted even if they have not mastered the relevant competencies and this, together with the poor use of assessment data to inform learning at the student level, contributes to the fact that many students complete their schooling without the competencies needed to continue their education or gain good jobs. Although there is no definitive Pacific research to confirm that the lack of clear learning standards is impacting formative classroom assessment and student-centred learning, it is probable that well-articulated and supported learning standards will increase student outcomes across the region. The absence of summative classroom assessment leads to a failure to address learning deficiencies before students transition to the next grade⁸. Global research has shown that the best performing countries have established learning

⁷ "Seven PIF countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa and Tonga) achieved universal primary education (MDG 2), five recorded mixed outcomes, while two countries failed to meet the target (Kiribati and PNG). Critical to the success of countries that achieved MDG 2 was the provision of free and compulsory education. All PIFS countries except Kiribati, PNG, and the Solomon Islands achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education." *2015 Pacific MDG Report*, PIFS.

⁸ This is not to imply that there is a strong causal link between poor or absent summative classroom assessment and a failure to address learning deficiencies – there are other influencing factors such as teacher competencies, the presence and use of learning resource and student well-being

standards, required teachers to have mastered the relevant competencies, including appropriate levels of subject knowledge, and have developed learning systems to monitor student achievement⁹.

The 2018 PILNA has demonstrated that critical thinking and problem solving remain issues for Pacific students: students performed less well in both literacy and numeracy questions that required interpretation and reasoning than they did in questions that required them to simply identify information.

Most teachers across the Pacific are trained and have met at least their national minimum requirements for teaching. Although most ministries of education report an increase in the number of trained and qualified teachers in primary and secondary schools, many, together with their development partners are finding it essential to invest additional funds in professional development programmes that strengthen school leaders' skills and teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical competencies as many teachers and school leaders have had few opportunities to participate in structured professional development or have adequate incentive to improve their teaching or school leadership capacities. Global research clearly points to the strong relationship between student achievement and teacher quality and has shown that there are very few examples of schools achieving sustained gains in student achievements in the absence of strong school leadership^{10,11}.

The Pacific countries' commitment to education, especially to primary education, is raising demand for wider post-primary opportunities given that most Pacific islanders are aware that recognized educational attainment and/or certified skills are now basic requirements for formal sector employment. The region's ministries of education also have recognized the disconnect between much of their curricula and what is needed to prepare students for future employment and other forms of livelihood. Ministers noted at the 2018 FEdMM that Pacific education systems must establish and adequately resource new learning pathways that can support children through ECE and primary education, through junior secondary and secondary education, and through secondary educations to work related skills training if they are to adequately and inclusively prepare children and youth for success in continued education and for meaningful, rewarding employment and to contribute to their communities' well-being. Pacific governments are very much aware that they must prepare the Pacific's youth to be able to respond to both current and emerging employment opportunities, locally, nationally, and regionally, including those that beginning to emerge through Australia's and New Zealand's Pacific Labour schemes.

2.3 Regionalism

In 2005 the Pacific's Leaders Forum committed to a shared policy of regionalism to strengthen cooperation and integration between and amongst their countries in areas where working together would produce better outcomes than they could if they worked individually. In 2015 the Leaders endorsed the Framework for Pacific Regionalism that today shapes the work of the Pacific Islands Forum¹². Forum Education Ministers have met regularly at the FEdMM since 2001. At the first FEdMM, ministers approved the development of a regional education framework to guide cooperation and collaboration and to shape strategies for national and regional actions to address shared challenges.

⁹ Mourshed, M, Chijioke, C, and Barber, M. (2010). How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better. McKinsey and Company.

¹⁰ Hanushek, E, Rivkin, S. (2010). Generalizations about Using Value-Added Measures of Teacher Quality. *American Economic Review* 100 (2).

¹¹ Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

¹² *Framework for Pacific Regionalism*, PIFS, 2014. Through the Forum PICs work towards targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the SAMOA Pathway for Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

To date, three regional frameworks have been endorsed by FEdMM: The Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) in 2001; The Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) in 2009; and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) in 2018. The first two resulted in a number of important DP and IA supported initiatives including: Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA); the Pacific Regional Qualifications and Standards (PRQS); 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). FBEAP and PEDF also supported countries to meet national and global education targets, including those in the Education for All Plan of Action and the MDGs.

Annex 1 provides in-depth description of PacREF within the Pacific Regionalism context.

2.4 The Six Contributing Countries

2.4.1 System Attributes

Table 1: Years of Schooling¹³

Contributing Country	ECE	Primary/Elementary	Secondary
Kiribati	1-3 yrs ECE	6 yrs Primary	3 yrs Junior Secondary and 4 yrs senior secondary
RMI	2 yrs ECE	8 yrs Elementary	4 yrs Secondary
Samoa	2 yrs ECE	8 yrs Elementary	5 yrs Secondary
Solomon Islands	1 yr ECE	6 yrs Elementary	3 yrs Junior Secondary and 4 yrs senior secondary
Tonga	3 yrs ECE	6 yrs Primary	4 yrs Junior Secondary and 3 yrs senior secondary
Tuvalu	1-3 yrs ECE	8 yrs Primary	5 yrs Secondary

Table 2: Contributing Countries' Systems Performance – Selected indicators
(latest available data)

	Kiribati	RMI	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu
Out-of-School Children, %						
Total	1.8 (2016)	18.8 (2018)	0.0 (2018)	8.0 (2018)	1.1 (2015)	0.0 (2017)
By Gender	n/a	M 22.0 F 5.2	M 0.0 F 0.0	M 2.1 F 14.2	n/a	M 0.0 F 0.0
Participation in ECE, %						
Total	70.9 (2016)	64.9 (2018)	26.0 (2018)	75.1 (2018)	n/a	92.0 (2017)
By Gender	M 69.6 F 72.1	n/a	M 24.0 F 28.0	M 72.6 F 78.0	n/a	M 91.0 F 93.0
Gross intake into the last grade of primary, %						
Total	100.0 (2016)	71.0 (2016)	105 (2017)	87.0 (2018)	116 (2013)	79.0 (2017)
By Gender	n/a	n/a	M 104 F 106	n/a	n/a	M 75.5 F 83.3
Trained teachers in primary schools, %						
Total	91.9 (2016)	71.0 (2016)	58.0 (2017)	74.0 (2018)	92.5 (2015)	86.0.0 (2017)

¹³ The terminology used (primary, elementary, junior, lower, upper secondary, etc.) is that used by the country.

By Gender	n/a	n/a	M 66.0 F 55.0	M 77.0 F 71.0	M 94.3 F 91.6	n/a
Literacy: G6 final year primary students achieving minimum proficiency in national assessments, %						
Total	23.5 (2016)	17.0 (2018)	28.0 (2017)	68.9 (2017)	35.0 (2015)	75.3 (2017)
By Gender	M 15.0 F 30.0	n/a	M 19.0 F 36.0	n/a	n/a	M 60.9 F 89.4
Numeracy: G6 final year primary students achieving minimum proficiency in national assessments, %						
Total	52.0 (2016)	32 (2018)	49.0 (2017)	70.8 (2017)	83.0 (2015)	64.5 (2017)
By Gender	M 46.0 F 59.0	n/a	M 39.0 F 59.0	n/a	n/a	M 56.5 F 72.3

Source: The contributing countries' annual education statistical reports

Annex 3 provides Pacific-wide comparative data on the above indicators.

2.4.2 Public and private (non-public) schools

Across the Pacific there is strong community and faith-based group participation in the management of schools at all levels. While in each of the contributing countries, communities and faith-based organizations establish and maintain private schools (Table 3), in most cases, except for elite private and international schools, national governments take responsibility for the training, supply and payment of teacher salaries, the setting, monitoring and assessment of curriculum, setting of operational policies, and provide grants to finance/subsidize free and compulsory education and capital works at all schools. And, all six of the contributing countries' governments provide significant subsidies to non-public schools. While some of their private schools have adopted external curriculum, all are required to fulfil the requirements of the local curriculum if their students sit locally set national examinations.

Across the Pacific, about 16% of primary and 40% of secondary schools are private and about 15% of primary and 17% of secondary students are enrolled in private schools. All schools in the Pacific, whether public or non-public are registered under the relevant national Education Act.

Table 3: Contributing Countries' – Number of Public and Private Schools

	Kiribati	RMI	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu
Primary -Public	94	74	144	375	108	9
Primary -Private	0	15	26	135	22	1
Secondary - Public	26	6	23	201	16	1
Secondary - Private	16	11	10	68	36	1

Sources: National Education Statistics – All data for 2019 school year.

2.4.3 Education Financing

Table 4 illustrates the proportion of national budget expenditures allocated to education in the contributing counties from 2017 to 2020 and each country's proposed budget targets for the medium term.

Table 4: Education Expenditures as a Proportion of Total Budget Expenditures

	2017 Education Expend.	2018 Education Expend.	2019 Education Expend.	2020 Education Expend.	2021 Education Expend.	2022 Education Expend.	2023 Education Expend.
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budget	Projection	Projection	Projection
Kiribati	13.5%	14.4%	14.0%	14.0%	14.7%	15.3%	15.8%
RMI	19.4%	18.9%	16.2%	19.2%	20.0%	20.4%	20.8%
Samoa	18.4%	17.9%	18.0%	18.1%	18.8%	19.6%	20.5%
Solomon Is	41.9%	40.2%	37.9%	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%
Tonga	15.6%	14.4%	12.5%	12.6%	14.1%	15.7%	17.6%
Tuvalu	13.4%	14.8%	11.4%	11.4%	12.1%	12.8%	13.6%

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

During 2017 to 2020, Kiribati and Tonga allocated around 14.0% of their national budgets to education; Samoa and RMI, about 18%; and Tuvalu averaged about 12%. The Solomon Islands' allocations reached as high as 40%. Their outlier position can partially be attributed to the outcomes of the RAMSI Initiative (2003-2017)¹⁴, which provided significant funding to the country to help restore law and order, rebuild institutions, and stabilize the Solomon Islands economy. This, to some extent, provided the fiscal space for the Solomon Islands to expand education investments, which they have maintained to date¹⁵. Tonga and Tuvalu have made projections to improve their education budget commitments over the medium term, reaching 17.6% and 13.6% respectively by 2023.

There is a positive indication of national commitment and dedication amongst the small island states to promote and develop their education sectors. Notwithstanding annual variations, the general trend shows a degree of consistency amongst the six contributing countries in maintaining consistent education investment flows in the last 3 years: all six countries managed to maintain roughly the same budget proportions year-on-year, with minimal variations.

Moving forward, all six contributing countries are anticipating gradual upward adjustments to their respective education budgets over the period 2021 to 2023; which effectively builds on past trends and implies prioritization towards education in the future. Kiribati expects the share of its education budget to increase by approximately 16 percent by 2023 and Tonga is also looking at attaining a higher education spend of 17.6 percent. Samoa and RMI are both foreseeing their education budgets to increase and surpass the 20% benchmark by 2023 (meeting GPE's investment criteria). Tuvalu, on the other hand, is projecting education spending to rise to above 13%, whilst the Solomon Islands government plans to maintain its spending ratio at 40% over the medium term¹⁶.

Overall, there are notable differences in budgetary commitments amongst the contributing countries. Solomon Islands is striding far ahead of the group with education expenditure ratios effectively doubling GPE's requirements. Education expenditures for Samoa and RMI are expected to reach the GPE benchmark by 2023,

¹⁴ <https://www.ramsi.org/>

¹⁵ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000191355>

¹⁶ On being contacted by the PacREF Programme Facilitating Unit in April 2020, each of the G6 countries confirmed its commitment to primary education and to seeking to increase both the overall allocation to education and to primary education within that allocation.

whilst Tonga and Kiribati's expenditures are following closely behind. Tuvalu is trailing the group, but its investments seem reasonable when compared to the education budgets of other countries such as Macau (13.3%), Congo (11.7%), Brazil (13.1%), Belgium (12%), Australia (13.5%), Grenada (12.4%), Ireland (12.8%)¹⁷.

Table 5 illustrates the spending on primary education as a proportion of the total education budget for each of the six contributing countries.

Table 5: Primary Education Expenditures Relative to Total Education Budget

	2017 Primary Educ Exp	2018 Primary Educ Exp	2019 Primary Educ Exp	2020 Primary Educ Exp	2021 Primary Educ Exp	2022 Primary Educ Exp	2023 Primary Educ Exp	Average Primary Educ Exp
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budget	Project	Project	Project	(2017-19)
Kiribati	40.0%	31.0%	38.0%	39.7%	39.0%	40.1%	40.5%	36.3%
RMI	30.0%	30.0%	36.0%	30.0%	30.0%	31.0%	31.0%	32.0%
Samoa	33.0%	36.0%	39%	37.3%	37.3%	37.2%	37.2%	36.0%
Solomon Is.	33.0%	23.0%	23.0%	25.0%	25.2%	25.8%	26.4%	26.3%
Tonga	39.5%	42.0%	34.0%	35.0%	37.0%	40.0%	42.0%	38.5%
Tuvalu	33.8%	32.9%	32.1%	47.9%	44.0%	42.0%	40.1%	30.0%

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

None of the six contributing countries meet the GPE encouraged 45% allocation of their annual total education budget to primary education. However, historical spending trends in the six countries signal a tendency to progressively increase primary education expenditures in the coming years, moving closer to the 45% target by 2023.

Over the 2017 to 2019 period, RMI and Tuvalu invested around 32-33% of their education budgets on primary education, Kiribati and Samoa averaged 36% and Tonga, 38.5%. The Solomon Islands alone recorded primary education spending below the 30% mark; achieving only a three-year average of 26.3% (2017-2019). The lower primary education spend does not match the government's sizeable education budgets within the same period (40% of their national budget). This disparity stems from earlier investments that the Solomon Islands' government made in primary education, which resulted in the establishment of 650 primary schools throughout the country¹⁸. The focus now has shifted to the development of secondary education where there are at present only 142 secondary schools.

Over the next 3 years (2021 to 2023), all six contributing countries are anticipating steady increases in their budgetary commitments for primary education. Leading the way are Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu with all three countries projecting spending to rise marginally above 40%. Tonga is expecting to elevate its share of primary education expenditures to 37.2%, RMI are anticipating a proportional spend of 31%, and the Solomon Islands, 26.4%.

2.4.4 The Challenges of financing education in the Pacific

The low education spends by the six contributing countries relative to GPE's expenditure targets can be explained by several extenuating factors. For these countries, the issue is not one of inability to prioritize

¹⁷ UNESCO education budget expenditures <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=183>

¹⁸ https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-doc_s/files/64/646ca53dd52160b5f17880be202b4233.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=l4cqiiVY%2BcBeSCWbe5ZQY%2BBK4zOpRElv9E0h%2BGSrBAo%3D&se=20201119T09%3A22%3A43Z&sp=r&rscc=public%2C%20maxage%3D864000%2C%20maxstale%3D86400&rsct=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Solomon_Is_Education_Strategic_Framework_2007_15.pdf%22

education spending over other sectors (or to solicit more internal budget funding support); rather it has one of having to address inherent challenges that limit their capacities to provide sufficient resources for the national social service priorities of education and health. These challenges include: (i) limited revenue capacities in small vulnerable economies to cater for all national needs, including essential developments in the education sector, (ii) heavy reliance on foreign aid and development assistance, (iii) non-government (communities, churches, etc, as alluded to in 2.3 above) contributions to education – these are substantial in most PICs and could be considered as part of 'domestic commitments' in GPE's benchmarks, (iv) extreme vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters - now a prominent threat to financial sustainability in all six contributing countries which is impacting economic capacities, and restricting further resources for education investments, and (v) budget expenditures on education already being high compared to other sectors within the national budgets – the case in each of the six countries, despite their extreme economic and climatic vulnerabilities. Aside from directly placing unexpected demands on the education budgets, it is probable that service delivery disruptions across sectors due to Covid-19 will further exacerbate existing pressures on national budgets

An appreciation of the Pacific context is of paramount importance. All six contributing countries are aware of their inherent resource constraints, and their inability to singularly raise resources for education investments. They also recognize that the provision of education services in their countries will continue to be a shared commitment requiring the mutual collaboration of government, DPs and non-government stakeholders, such as the church, noting that these stakeholders have provided significant investments in education development over the years. These partnerships will likely remain an enduring feature across the contributing countries' education sectors as they are critical pillars for education development across the Pacific¹⁹.

Table 6 provides a comparative summary of the combined contributions of government, DPs and non-government partners to education in the six contributing countries.

¹⁹ We note that GPE's standard expenditure criteria only considers 'government's budget commitments' as a reference point for 'national commitment' towards education investments. There is no acknowledgement of the contributions of other stakeholders like non-government organizations or development partners, even though they have been, and will continue to be integral components of ongoing education developments in the G6 countries.

Table 6: Government, DP and Non-Government Contributions to Education

GPE Country	Expenditure Composition	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
		actual	actual	actual	budget	Project	Project	Project
Kiribati	Govt & Dev Partners	16.0%	17.0%	16.0%	16.0%	17.0%	17.0%	18.0%
	Govt & Dev Partners & Non-Government	18.0%	19.0%	18.0%	18.0%	19.0%	19.0%	20.0%
RMI	Govt & Dev Partners	22.0%	21.0%	18.0%	21.0%	22.0%	22.0%	22.0%
	Govt & Dev Partners & Non-Government	34.2%	33.2%	30.2%	33.2%	34.2%	34.2%	34.2%
Samoa	Govt & Dev Partners	19.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	21.0%	22.0%
	Govt & Dev Partners & Non-Government	24.4%	25.4%	25.4%	25.4%	25.4%	26.4%	27.4%
Solomon Islands	Govt & Dev Partners	44.2%	41.8%	39.7%	41.0%	41.0%	41.0%	41.0%
	Govt & Dev Partners & Non-Government	68.6%	66.2%	64.1%	65.4%	65.4%	65.4%	65.4%
Tonga	Govt & Dev Partners	20.0%	19.0%	15.0%	16.0%	17.0%	19.0%	21.0%
	Govt & Dev Partners & Non-Government	27.4%	26.4%	22.8%	23.0%	24.7%	26.5%	28.6%
Tuvalu	Govt & Dev Partners	15.8%	18.5%	12.9%	14.5%	15.3%	16.1%	16.9%
	Govt & Dev Partners & Non-Government	19.0%	21.0%	16.0%	17.0%	18.0%	19.0%	20.0%

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

The PacREF Programme Facilitating Unit (PFU²⁰) 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 in the near future²¹. It is anticipated that this study will provide a deeper understanding of the political economy of education financing across the region and about how both macro-level national budget allocation and within-ministry sub-sector allocation decisions are made and how those decisions are influenced by external (DP) financing. Once the PFU is well-informed, where appropriate and through the FEdMM mechanism, it will make country-level representations to argue for renewed Cabinet level discussions on more appropriate sector and within sector funding allocations for education generally and for ECE and basic education more specifically.

2.5 Addressing Knowledge Gaps

The PacREF Programme is strengthening the capacity of regional agencies to identify and address a number of knowledge gaps that can inform education systems’ development across the region. Existing knowledge gaps about various aspects of the Pacific’s education systems include relevant curriculum, student assessment, the links between ECE experiences and PILNA outcomes, assessing system and school effectiveness, how information influences policy and planning, teachers’ competencies, and labour market entry. Increasingly, the PacREF will invest in high-quality IA-managed research (including just-in-time policy focused research) and in utilising the PacREF reporting structures to target knowledge sharing through annual symposia, the PHES and FEdMM.

²⁰ The PFU is based at USP and is financed by USP and MFAT until June 2021. Financing beyond June 2021 is expected to be from the GPE ESPIG grant.

²¹ Option being considered include a World Bank study financed through the DFAT financed World Bank Pacific Facility Trust Fund, a study financed through the GPE-financed ADB managed Programme Development Grant, or one financed directly through the PacREF Programme.

The Programme intends that as countries engage in developing, contextualizing and embedding the regional goods (RGs) in their systems they will be effectively developing and utilising the knowledge base about their systems and about what practices are effective in raising learning in their contexts. Knowledge and good practice sharing are at the heart of the PacREF’s South-South programme (*Wansolwara* – see section 5.3) – reinforcing the theme of Pacific Regionalism which lies at the core of the PacREF.

Annex 4 provides examples of PacREF activities that will contribute to strengthening the regional knowledge base.

2.6 Data Issues

Each of the six contributing countries face challenges in collecting and producing quality and timely education statistics. This includes inadequate processes to ensure data quality and low technical capacity to produce and disseminate statistics. With the exception of Tonga, the six countries now have broad function Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), thanks to assistance provided by EQAP, UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), Australia, the ADB and UNICEF. Currently UIS is collaborating with EQAP to support the contributing countries to implement data quality improvement plans, including improving EMIS technologies, training in statistical processes and technical assistance with statistical outputs, such as education statistics reports.

Based on UIS data provided by all PICs, EQAP is working to improve the availability of regional education statistics and to provide internationally comparable statistical data through its Pacific Data Hub. This data will be used alongside national data to report on progress for SDG 4 and PacREF. A regional data collection mechanism using online data dissemination is being considered to enable more detailed and timely data to be shared with stakeholders including DPs.

2.7 Bilateral and Regional DP Programmes

Across the Pacific, MFAT, DFAT, UNESCO and UNICEF have current bilateral commitments of USD 717.5 m: MFAT, USD 99.5m; DFAT, USD 581.5m; UNICEF, USD 27.3m and UNESCO USD 9.2 (see table 7)²². Of the contributing countries, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati are, by far, the largest recipients of education aid. It is worth noting though that PNG receives 54% of all bilateral education aid. Commitments to regional programmes from the same four development partners total USD 212.5m. Of that amount, USD 78m is committed to USP, USD 13.7m to EQAP, and USD 13.1m to inclusive education programmes that are implemented by various agencies. These amounts exclude commitments to secondary scholarships (by DFAT) and tertiary scholarships (by MFAT and DFAT). *Annex 5 provides details of MFAT’s and DFAT’s current investment in Pacific education.*

Table 7: MFAT, DFAT, UNICEF and UNESCO Ongoing and Planned Bilateral Commitments in the Pacific, USD millions

DPs	Contributing Countries					
	Kiribati	RMI*	Samoa	Solomon Is	Tonga	Tuvalu
MFAT	6.900	0.000	6.426	31.122	2.274	0.000
DFAT	62.560	0.000	11.560	85.252	5.100	5.848
UNICEF	1.990	0.879	0.788	4.261	2.404	1.088
UNESCO	0.003	0.003	7.350	0.126	0.039	0.230
Total	71.453	0.882	26.124	120.761	9.817	7.166

* Information on the extent to which RMI is funded by the US or other DPs has been requested but has not been received to date

²² The PFU has requested information from donors, other than those included in table 5, about their investments in Pacific education, but no information has been received.

DPs	Non-Contributing Countries								
	Cook Is	FSM	Fiji	Nauru	Niue	Palau	PNG	Tokelau	Vanuatu
MFAT	7.724	0.000	3.288	4.536	2.098	0.000	0.668	1.910	32.540
DFAT	0.000	1.632	17.000	0.884	0.000	0.000	376.720	0.000	14.960
UNICEF	0.010	4.310	1.060	0.010	0.015	0.014	9.030	0.008	1.452
UNESCO	0.005	0.003	0.169	0.003	0.004	0.006	1.220	0.002	0.069
Total	7.739	5.945	21.517	5.433	2.117	0.020	387.638	1.920	49.021

Periods vary by country, but generally the development assistance covers the period from 2016 on.

Tables do not reflect very recent changes to DP programmes that may be underway or planned as responses to the impact of Covid-19

Sources: Information provided to the PFU by MFAT, DFAT, UNICEF and UNESCO, March-May 2020.

2.8 GPE's Engagement with the PacREF

GPE has been strongly supportive of the Pacific's approach to a regional application for an ESPIG grant and has been kept apprised of all activities associated with the design and drafting of the PacREF and the IRP since 2014. GPE representatives briefed the PIFS Deputy Secretary General in 2014, met with and briefed the PHES in 2015, presented grant options and guidelines to the PHES-SWG in 2016, and attended the FEdMM that approved the PacREF, in 2018. GPE representatives have also visited more than half of the contributing countries participating in the PacREF Programme to encourage the Pacific's participation in GPE and to detail GPE's processes. The GPE representative also attended and briefed the PacREF Steering Committee (SC) and the CROP HRD WG²³ in 2019 on processes for GPE regional application. Through the ADB (the region's GA), the Pacific has received country grants from GPE for FSM and RMI, and for the Pacific region, two: a USD 200,000 ESDG in 2017, and a USD 400,000 PDG in 2018.

The rationale for GPE support to The PacREF Programme is strong. Education and human capital development are directly linked to economic growth, productivity, and the improvement of living standards.²⁴ Unsatisfactory education outcomes have been highlighted by the Pacific Leaders, FEdMM and the PHES as a constraint to national and regional growth, employment, and poverty reduction. Political and social leaders throughout the Pacific anticipate that as primary education learning achievement improves, more Pacific children will progress to and through secondary and tertiary education and will enter either the national, Pacific regional, or international (Australia and New Zealand) labour market and in turn bring economic benefits to themselves and to their communities. The activities implemented, and the RGs developed under the PacREF Programme are all expected to have a direct impact on the capacity of the Pacific's education systems to provide better quality instruction, which in turn will improve both education and labour market outcomes for Pacific islanders, including those that are disadvantaged. The benefits of GPE support will be felt from the foundational level through higher levels of school readiness, at the primary level through better literacy and numeracy skills, and at post-primary levels, all of which in turn will contribute to a more equitable, economically stronger, and more secure Pacific.

The Programme modality of utilizing the combined education development capacities of the University of the South Pacific (USP), the Educational Quality and Assessment Program (EQAP) of the Pacific Community (SPC), UNICEF and UNESCO and the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) to develop, embed and support a series of RGs to raise learning outcomes provides GPE with an innovative and strategic opportunity to invest in the Pacific region's educational development in a way that will have significant impact on 15 countries. Through

²³ The CROP Human Resources Development Working Group is the part of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) architecture that is responsible for leading policy discussion human resource issues and development in the region. It is a forum for the CROP agencies that are mandated to provide technical advice and assistance to member states in regards to training and capacity building of human resources. As PacREF is the regional framework for education, the CROP HRD WG has become part of the its governance structure responsible for the implementation and development of its implementation rolling plans.

²⁴ Barro, R. 2001. "Human Capital and Economic Growth." *The American Economic Review* 91 (2): 12–17.

the meeting of PacREF's financing gap, GPE will help the region to consolidate gains already made, to advocate for equity and inclusion, to promote quality through the professional development of teachers, and through improved assessment and through Pacific-wide country-based use of system-wide standards and proven classroom practices.

Section 6.1 speaks to the close alignment between the PacREF policy and Programme and GPE's strategic goals.

3 The Wider PacREF Programme

The PacREF is the current iteration of an ongoing regional education agenda in the Pacific – it was not developed in response to the opportunity to gain grant support for the region from GPE. The PacREF Programme is the programme of support that has been developed to respond to the regional architecture, policy and plans that have developed as part of the PacREF.

The FEdMM-approved PacREF policy requires that the PacREF Programme satisfies three needs. It should

- (i) provide PICs with well-targeted, demand responsive RGs that assist in improving their systems' performance,
- (ii) strengthen regional agencies' ability to provide high-quality tools and professional services, including research, in order that the RGs developed under PacREF are effective and well-supported and,
- (iii) provide analyses of the issues and constraints that influence the quality of schooling across the region.

3.1 Beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of the PacREF Programme are the students that attend and will be attending ECE centres and primary schools across 15 countries in the Pacific. They will directly benefit as the contextualized tools and standards (the RGs) are absorbed into their schooling systems' routine practices and influence the quality of teaching and learning in those systems. Through the PacREF's MEL Plan, Programme impact will be measured among four key stakeholder groups:

- **Students:** With successful implementation and achievement of the medium-term goals, the impact on students will be evidenced by improved learning outcomes and improved student welfare.
- **Teachers:** The achievement of the outputs and medium-term goals will result in a teaching force in the Pacific that is better prepared and supported to meet the needs of students.
- **National education systems:** The national education systems will reflect the impact of the PacREF in their increased capacities to utilise regional tools and services, and to develop and assess their own systems, improving the relevance of all levels of the system.
- **Regional agencies:** Successful implementation of the PacREF will strengthen regional agencies and enable them to provide tools and services more effectively across the region.

Although both public and private schools and their students and staff throughout the Pacific will benefit from the RGs that PacREF activities will produce, **no PacREF Programme funding from any source (including MFAT and GPE) will finance PacREF Programme activities in private schools, nor will it finance private schools or private schools systems' participation in PacREF activities.** The application of the RGs in private schools and across private school systems will be financed through either those schools' and systems' budgets or via their government's education budgets as part of their national education programme.

Box 1. The Pacific Regional Education Framework: Vision, Goals, Policy Objectives and Intended Policy Outcomes, and Implementation Modalities

Vision

To equitably raise the quality of schooling and student outcomes across the Pacific.

Goals

- Establishing upward trends in the percentage of preschool children that are assessed as school-ready when they enter primary school and achieving age-appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy at the primary level.
- Laying the foundations necessary to ensure that upward trends can be established in the number of well-prepared and appropriately qualified secondary and post-secondary graduates.
- Improving inclusiveness, student wellbeing and the maintenance of Pacific languages, values and traditions.

Policy Area Objectives and Intended Policy Outcomes

Quality and Relevance

Objective: High quality, relevant programmes are provided for learners at all levels of education.

Intended Outcome: All learners are provided with a safe and supportive environment, within which they are offered high quality learning opportunities that are meaningful, valuable, inclusive and future-focused.

Learning Pathways

Objective: Learners' needs are met through a broad range of programmes and delivery modalities.

Intended Outcome: All learners have equal access to multiple and seamless pathways and modalities of learning that will allow them to meet their full potential.

Student Outcomes and Well-being

Objective: Learners at all levels of education achieve their full potential.

Intended Outcome: All learners acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attributes to enable them to contribute to their families, communities and to nation building.

Teacher Professionalism

Objective: The teaching profession is supported and empowered through opportunities for continuous development, shared understanding and accountability.

Intended Outcome: Competent, qualified and certified teachers¹ and school leaders who are current in their professional knowledge and practice. Teachers are supported, engaged, effective and committed to the holistic development of their students.

Implementation Modalities

- Providing robust tools, mechanisms and support structures to assist national efforts to improve student learning outcomes and wellbeing.
- Establishing a strong system of regional minimum service standards and performance monitoring.
- Institutionalizing country-to-country (South-South) cooperation as a region-wide approach to improving policy and practice.

3.2 The PacREF Implementation Approach

3.2.1 The PacREF Implementation Rolling Plan

The PacREF's first Implementation Rolling Plan (the 2019 IRP) detailed how these three requirements were to be achieved through seven theme-based IA partnerships that built on the IAs' proven capacity to deliver sustainable, affordable and high-quality programmes and tools, such as the PILNA from EQAP and ECE guidelines from UNICEF. However, lessons learnt in the first year of implementation (see Section 6.6.1) caused the IAs to seek approval from the PacREF Steering Committee to move away from the seven theme-based partnerships and to reshape the Programme to more obviously reflect the PacREF's four policy areas (Quality and Relevance, Learning Pathways, Student Outcomes, and Teacher Professionalism).

The first annual update of the IRP, the 2020 IRP, reflects these adjustments and in doing so provides a clearer Programme focus on:

- system capacities to support ECE and to raise literacy and numeracy outcomes (including improving learning assessments and increasing system capacities to use assessment diagnostics to improve learning);
- the provision of well-trained, competent highly motivated and well-supported teachers (including teacher qualifications, teacher competencies, and teacher development and support);
- inclusive learning and to open alternative learning pathways so that access to learning is open to all groups including boys and girls, young men and women, youth, persons with disabilities, rural communities and minority groups²⁵;
- information systems, information management, and the use of evidence to improve policy, planning and practice;
- sustainable outputs and outcomes; and
- country-to-country (South-South) cooperation and the sharing of effective policy and good practice.

3.2.2 Regional Goods, Services and Standards

In operationalizing the PacREF, the region's education leaders identified shared challenges to which the solutions could be developed in the form of a regional good, that could then be contextualised to specific country contexts. Box 2 captures the regional goods, services and standards (the RGs) that the 15 PacREF participating countries have indicated they wish to see developed over Phase 1 of the Programme. Once developed, these RGs will be contextualised to 'fit' and be fully relevant to each of the regions' education systems. In each case, the development of the RGs involves activities in which elements of the RG are designed (or strengthened or consolidated if earlier versions exist), tested, and, contextualized in *situ* to ensure their 'fit' with existing national policies, and that they are contextually embedded. *Annex 6 provides detailed information on how these regional goods will be realised.*

Annex 7 provides detail on each of the RGs, the activities that contribute to its development, contextualization and embedding in national education systems, the scheduling of those activities and the extent to which the six contributing countries benefit from those activities.

²⁵ The PacREF aligns with the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration in striving towards gender parity in informal, primary, secondary and tertiary education and training. It also supports the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025 and responds to its goal of expanding early intervention and education of children with disabilities.

Box 2: Regional Goods, Services and Standards to be Progressed in PacREF Phase 1

Policy Area 1: Quality and Relevance

- Regionally identified and agreed definition of non-cognitive skills
- Regional needs assessment on the status of quality of school learning environment in the Pacific region
- Quality Assurance Frameworks for quality school learning environments are in place.

Policy Area 2: Learning Pathways

- Regional tools for the governance, management, quality assurance, financing and programme development of ECE
- Regional framework for the domains of home to school transition
- Regional framework identifying learning pathways from ECE to adulthood
- Pacific Skills Portal
- Regional Pacific Skills Dialogue/Summit

Policy Area 3: Student Outcomes and Wellbeing

- Waka Learning Hub is utilized by in-service teachers to improve literacy and numeracy instruction
- Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (primary)
- Regional assessment at lower secondary aligned to SDG4.1.1

Policy Area 4: Teacher Professionalism

- Regional teacher competency standards
- Regional accreditation and recognition of teacher education programmes
- Regional standards and qualifications in school leadership
- Regional framework for continuous professional development

3.2.3 Prioritizing RGs and their Associated Activities

The first step in the 2020 annual updating of the IRP was to reconfirm which RG-based clusters of activities the PICs thought would most benefit their systems. That exercise provided a ‘preferred’ activity list which was then jointly reviewed by the IAs and PFU to ensure that the 15 participating PICs could participate in activity clusters in an equitable way and that the most vulnerable PICs and those where literacy outcomes were lowest (see below) were adequately represented. This exercise was also designed to ensure that the six contributing countries’ preferences were prioritized in that listing wherever it was technically and politically feasible. A pre-final activity schedule was then drafted and shared with all participating countries to reconfirm their commitment to participate in those activities and ensure that each fully understood the demands on their ministry, ministry staff and resources that that commitment required. This exercise was facilitated at the country level by each of the participating countries’ PacREF Focal Point – a senior ministry official that has responsibility for coordinating all aspects of their country’s PacREF activity.

Vulnerability: PICs’ vulnerability was assessed using the 2019 UNDP’s Human Development Index (see table 8). Of those countries included in 2019 HDI, all but Palau fall in the bottom half the rankings, with the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and PNG falling into the lowest quartile. In addition, Tuvalu, Nauru, Niue and Tokelau were recognised as vulnerable due to their small size and aid dependent economies

Table 8: Pacific Islands 2019 HDI Rankings out of 186 countries included in the 2019 HDI

The Contributing Countries			Other Participating Countries					
	HDI	Ranking		HDI	Ranking		HDI	Ranking
Solomon Is	0.557	153	PNG	0.543	155	Cook Islands	NI	NI
Kiribati	0.623	132	Vanuatu	0.597	141	Nauru	NI	NI
Marshall Is	0.698	117	FSM	0.614	135	Niue	NI	NI
Samoa	0.707	111	Fiji	0.724	98	Tokelau	NI	NI
Tonga	0.717	105	Palau	0.814	55			
Tuvalu	NI	NI						

NI = Not included in the HDI

186 countries are included in the 2019 HDI

Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes: A review of the Grade 6 national assessments of literacy and numeracy and of regional PILNA outcomes, though the former is not comparable across countries, suggests that it is most probable that the lowest levels of literacy proficiency are in Tonga, Tuvalu and Kiribati (contributing countries) and FSM, Nauru and Vanuatu (in the group of non-contributing countries). In the contributing countries, numeracy outcomes were lowest in RMI, Kiribati and Samoa.

3.2.4 Ensuring Fair Targeting of the six Contributing Countries in RG Development and Contextualization

There are three types of activities in PacREF Programme IRP; regional, multi-country, and single or few country activities. All are expected to be implemented in two stages, with the six contributing countries being prioritized in Stage 1 of each activity wherever feasible:

Regional activities are those that respond to regionally identified shared challenges which immediately lend themselves to a solution in the form of a regional good such as a tool or set of standards, that can be contextualized to suit specific country contexts. When implementing regional activities, the IAs will adopt the following protocol: Stage 1 will most usually involve only a few countries as members of a Taskforce or a regionally representative consultation group. During Stage 1 RG foundations and parameters will be developed for approval by either the PHES or FEEdMM. If this stage involves setting up a Taskforce, the contributing countries will be prioritized for Taskforce membership and in any piloting. Stage 2 will include the contextualization and embedding of the RG in national contexts. IAs will prioritize the six contributing countries in these processes.

Multi-country activities are activities in which a group of countries have prioritized their participation. [All of these activities passed reviews by the IAs and by the Steering Committee (SC) and CROP HRD WG to ensure that they fit within the PacREF and will contribute to RG development and/or in-country RG take up.] In implementing these activities, the six contributing countries will participate in Stage 1 and the remaining countries in Stage 2.

Single or few country activities are those activities requested by countries which were not in the original IRP listings but have been confirmed by the IAs and SC as having the potential to secure RG take-up, strengthen gains in a PacREF policy area or form a learning platform for other countries. Where one or more countries are requesting the same activity as a contributing country then, depending on IA-assessed efficiencies, the contributing country will participate in Stage 1 while the other country will participate in Stage 2.

Annex 6 details scheduled country participation in Programme activities in both 2020-21 and over the 2021-22 to 2022-23 period.

3.3 Implementation

The activity clusters in each of the four policy areas are made up of those activities that the IA's, based on their extensive regional experience, have deemed necessary to deliver the RGs, the technical and operational support and the outputs that the participating countries have requested. While each of the participating countries will integrate activity outputs and RGs into their national education policies, programmes and practices, the integration of PacREF Programme into the business plans of the IAs and into their recurrent country support activities will help ensure the sustainability of those PacREF generated reforms.

To ensure that Programme resources are maximised and that the technical strengths of each IA is optimised, and to minimise any duplication of effort, IA partnerships have been formalised around each of the four policy areas. Each partnership includes the IAs that work in that area, the national education systems that have prioritised their participation in developing the RGs in that policy area, and relevant development partners. While it is expected that all the Pacific islands' education systems will benefit from the output of each policy area partnership, not all have joined each partnership. Countries have predominantly joined partnerships on the basis of its activities and RGs' alignment to their national plans and priorities.

To ensure the broadest possible awareness of the progress made in each policy area and partnership, the PFU will maintain a PacREF website that will keep the 15 participating countries, as well as other stakeholders fully apprised of both Programme progress and of emerging challenges in implementation.

3.3.1 Implementation at the Regional Level

IAs work directly with the participating countries' national education systems, while the PFU will be responsible for the Programme administration, assisting IAs if requested, hosting PacREF governance meetings, and coordinating the South-South programme of intra-regional learning and cooperation.

Working with the participating countries, the IAs develop, test, contextualize and establish the RGs. Their inputs are primarily in those areas that are highly technical or require advanced training, including curriculum, assessment, developing and monitoring service and performance standards, teacher policy, teacher training, teacher competencies, and teacher support, information management; and policy evaluation. As they work to embed the RGs across the region, the IAs will align with and complement the efforts of the Pacific governments and DPs in a number of areas including in ECE policy and programming, student assessment, teacher upgrading, policy and planning and data collection and use.

Each of the IAs will utilize their respective annual regional meetings as an additional forum for progressing the PacREF Programme and for sharing advances on PacREF-financed activities that have been made across the region and by other IAs. This will create at least four opportunities for the region's high-level education officials to be kept abreast of advances under the Programme, and importantly, of the challenges being faced in implementation, both expected and unexpected. Feedback at these meetings is expected to provide additional guidance to programme implementors, particularly as they interact with national systems and move to shift traditional practices and learned behaviors.

3.3.2 Implementation at the Country Level

Ministries of Education and PacREF's IAs are implementing partners. It is widely understood by education ministers and their senior managers that the success of the PacREF Programme is very much dependent on their ability and willingness to promote and facilitate changes in practices in their national ministries and schools. Each country's head of system (their member of the PHES) has committed to ensuring that their ministries coordinate closely with all relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries, internally and regionally. They

have also agreed to organize national consultation meetings, as required, around the various aspects of the Programme. The countries' PacREF Focal Points will coordinate all PacREF events and communication, including managing the data flow between their country and EQAP.

The Programme does not require any new approaches to activity implementation or to the process of developing and subsequently embedding the RGs as the implementation of all Programme activities. It will follow the already established practices of the IAs that work across the fifteen participating countries. A critical element of the Programme is its draw on the IAs established successful practices, and in particular their capacity to mainstream the technical aspects of their programmes and products into the appropriate education ministry office(s) and/or related agencies.

Over the course of the Programme (2020-2023) each of the six contributing countries will be updating their national education plans: Kiribati's plan ended in 2019 and is currently being updated, the Solomon Islands, RMI, Tuvalu and Tonga education plans all run through 2020 and are being updated this year. Samoa's plan is new (2019-2024) and work on its update is expected to begin in 2023. If requested to do so, each of the IAs will provide targeted assistance to these six countries as they build the PacREF activities and the use of the RGs into their national education agendas. By shaping the appropriate parts of their forward national programmes around the contributions that PacREF provides in the form of the activities that contribute to developing, contextualizing and embedding the RGs, the six countries will be helping to ensure the relevance, fit and sustainability of each RG in their systems.

3.3.3 South-South Cooperation

Over the course of Phase 1, the Programme will establish a programme of South-South collaboration in response to education ministers' requests to strengthen country-to-country collaboration, to promote regionalism and collaboration through partnership, and to strengthen sector leadership, including leadership in developing and sharing innovation. To progress activities that address these themes, the Programme is building on the already growing cooperation amongst countries, on existing structures that promote the sharing of resources and mutual support, and on the historical role of regional agencies such as SPC's EQAP and USP.

The Programme is working through IoE to create a Pacific-based '*Wansolwara Platform*', a dialogic and relational space within which the Programme can encourage genuine cooperation, collaboration and effective partnership, not only among PICs but also with development partners and the PacREF's IAs. Primarily, the Wansolwara platform will be a dialogic space to promote Talanoa, Tok stori, Bwebwenato²⁶ – i.e. dialogue to find tangible solutions to shared problems that are carefully considered, appreciative of consequences and that build on consensus.

3.3.4 Building on On-going Regional Efforts

In developing in-demand RGs the PacREF Programme is building on a history of regional cooperation. Long before PacREF, regional agencies and Pacific offices of international organisations worked to achieve common goals and address Pacific-wide challenges. Two of the more prominent areas of regional cooperation are teacher competencies and the assessment of student learning (see Box 3). Each provides an example of how the IAs and PacREF participating countries can successfully work together towards delivering RGs with broad utility.

²⁶ Talanoa – Fijian, Samoan and Tongan term for dialogue, tok stori – Solomon Island pidgin for dialogue, bwebwenato – Marshallese for dialogue.

Box 3 Building on Ongoing Regional Efforts: Examples of Regional to National Contextualisation

In developing in-demand RGs the PacREF Programme is building on a history of regional cooperation. Long before PacREF, regional agencies and Pacific offices of international organisations worked to achieve common goals and address Pacific-wide challenges. Two of the more prominent areas of regional cooperation are teacher competencies and the assessment of student learning. Each provides an example of how the IAs and PacREF participating countries can successfully work together towards delivering RGs with broad utility.

Example 1: Teacher competencies

Work on defining and measuring teacher competencies began in 2007 when EQAP (then SPBEA) and UNESCO worked with the MoEs of all 15 countries that are participating in PacREF to develop their competency frameworks and associated measurement systems. The work of both agencies in regularly revisiting and updating that work across the region, facilitated the start of a programme in 2019 that is shaping a regional teacher competency framework, that is inclusive of not only education ministry perspectives but also those of teacher training institutions and of practicing teachers, as well as employing current information and communication technologies. The GPE investment through PacREF will accelerate this work and result in a regionally defined and implemented teacher competency standards (one of the PacREF RGs).

Example 2: Assessment of Student learning

EQAP's work on regional assessments of student learning in literacy and numeracy has, since 2011, developed, with support from multiple sources including Australia, New Zealand and UNESCO. Initially the work began with the design and implementation of the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) at years 4 and 6. It has grown into a regionally owned and administered large scale assessment program that is widely supported as a regional good. While Investment in the PILNA programme continues from other sources, GPE's investment into the work through PacREF will extend the capacity of the program to measure at a lower secondary level as well as at the end of primary and early primary levels. This will bring the work in line with global indicators. PILNA is one of 9 cross-national assessments recognized by the UIS as meeting the requirements for measuring SDG 4.1.1 (b).

3.3.5 Covid-19 Considerations

As the risk of Covid-19 reached the Pacific, virtually all Pacific Island countries implemented unprecedented measures including the closing of international borders, and nationwide school closures. Of the 15 Pacific Island Countries covered by PacREF, Covid-19 cases were identified in Fiji (32 total cases) and Papua New Guinea (534 total cases), with many more in neighbouring and connecting countries, including Guam, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Covid-19 is taking a striking toll economically on many Pacific Island countries, while also highlighting critical risks and vulnerabilities due to weak health systems, isolation and lack of preparedness and resilience across all systems, including education. Across the region, the pandemic led to a heightened awareness of the vulnerability of the Pacific Island country school systems, as most schools closed without clear plans or systems to ensure learning would continue and to support a safe return to school once schools reopened. Pacific Island governments, together with partners, recognize the high risk of adverse impact on children's learning and well-being, as well as long-term educational outcomes, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

Covid-19 has also coincided with category 5 Tropical Cyclone (Harold) that devastated huge numbers of communities and schools in Vanuatu and impacted on Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga as well, while response efforts were limited due to challenges securing supplies and support with borders closed. The 15 countries in

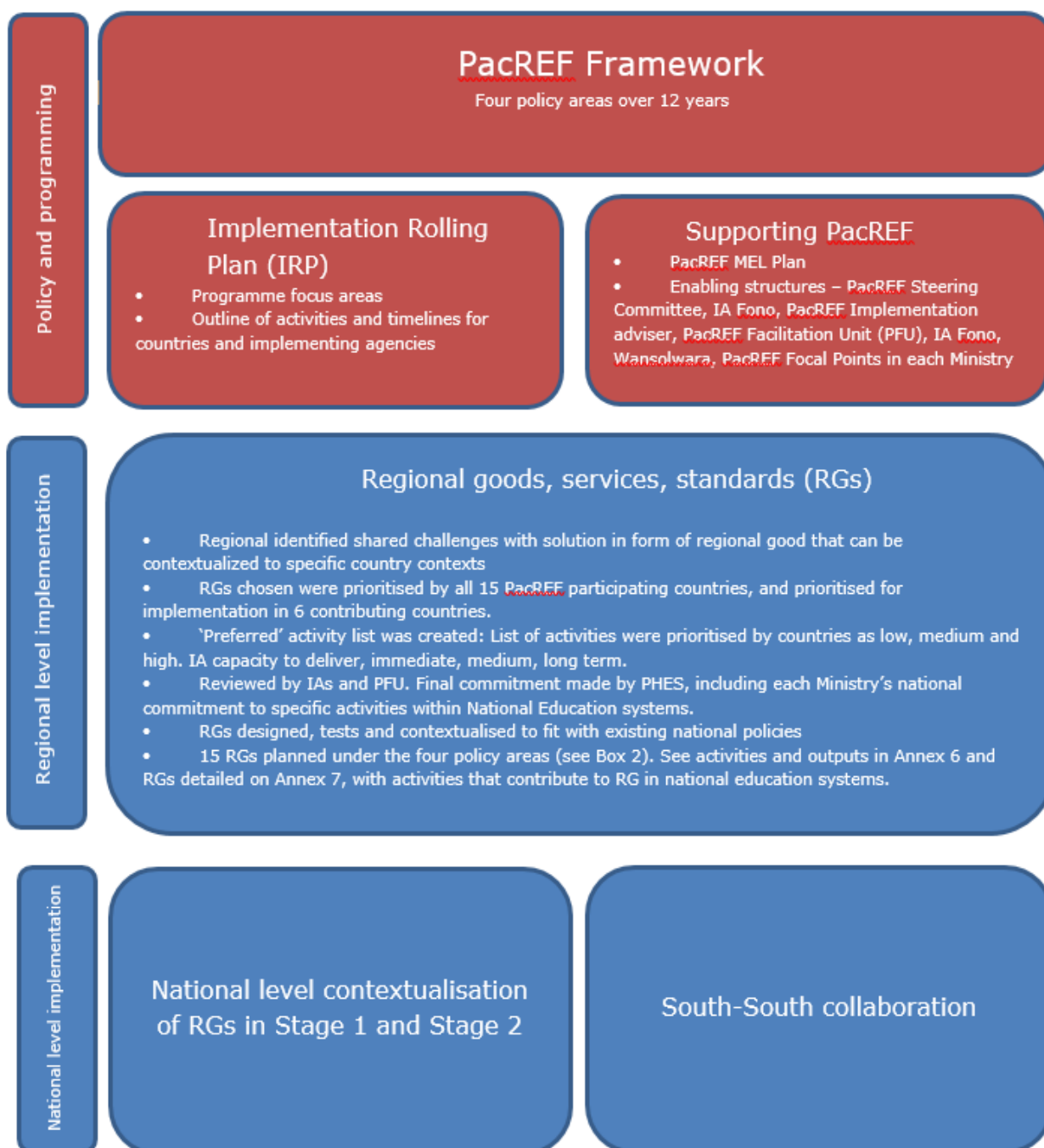
the Pacific region have approximately 2.9 million children enrolled in schools and early childhood education centres. While all schools in the region are now open, Pacific Island countries are actively engaged in revising their education systems facing the risk of Covid-19 and other disease outbreaks, developing new plans, systems, capacities, tools and approaches to ensure continuity of learning and operation of schools with safety, hygiene, protection, social/emotional wellbeing and support to all learners, under all circumstances.

While the PacREF Programme is not designed to offer a regional response to address the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on the Pacific's education systems, the IAs do recognize that it is possible that conditions may become such that FEdMM directs a change of focus from the regionally agreed programme. Although it is clear that Covid-19 will be on the agenda of the 2020 FEdMM, it is not yet known if Covid-19 related PacREF discussions will follow. Unless and until, FEdMM significantly redirect the focus of the PacREF Programme it will, wherever feasible, be available to provide whatever support it can to the targeted Covid-19 response efforts across the region, financed by governments, their DPs or by civil society.

It is recognised, however, that the Programme's implementation may be significantly impacted over the short-term, and perhaps longer, by the Covid-19 responses and precautionary steps now in place across the Pacific and the wider global community, including those that impact families, schools, community interactions, travel and use of work place restrictions. Adjustments have been made, and will continue to be made, to the short-term Programme implementation schedule. Wherever possible the Programme activities and RG development will follow the schedule proposed in the 2020 IRP. For the foreseeable future, Programme meetings of all descriptions will go online and work programmes leading to and coming out of those meetings are being adapted accordingly. This strategy will be reviewed by the PFU, IAs and SC, on a quarterly basis.

Diagram 1, below, illustrates the relationship between the PacREF, the PacREF Programme and the Programme's implementation, regionally, nationally and through South-South cooperation.

Diagram 1: Wider PacREF Programme Implementation Approach



4 Governance Structures

Two interacting governance structures support the PacREF. One at the inter-governmental level that determines, directs and oversees the operationalization of PacREF policies, and one that ensures coherence, alignment and mutual accountability in the IAs’ interactions with each other, with Pacific governments and with education stakeholders.

4.1 Regional Governance Structure

The inter-governmental (regional) level governance and oversight structure require that the FEdMM sets policy and advises the PHES on its implementation requirements. The PHES in turn advise the SC and are reported to by the SC²⁷. The PHES are responsible for Programme implementation in their countries and for ensuring that PacREF policies are adhered to. The Programme includes adequate investment in programme management including the financing of a professional experienced programme management team at the PFU. Each country has a senior staff member designated as the PacREF Focal Point.

In addition, a (Regional) Local Education Group (LEG) - that includes the contributing countries and the CROP HRD WG, and civil society) provides the six contributing countries, DPs and the IAs a voice in matters related to GPE funding and the implementation and oversight of GPE funded activities. The LEG is positioned to provide both advice and guidance to the SC and the PFU.

4.2 Implementing Agencies' Governance Structure

The IA's governance structure is modelled on the Pacific Fono²⁸, and is located within the regional governance structure (see above) and has a function at both the regional and national levels. It is the forum through which IAs reflect on, critique, rethink and plan the various activities and processes that deliver and report on the PacREF. It also provides a forum for critical dialogue on regional cooperation and for proposals to further strengthen regional cooperation and related national action.

At the regional level, the IA Fono serves as a design, technical assistance and resourcing group, annually framing the PacREF IRP and, subsequently, taking responsibility for its implementation, its monitoring and for reporting its impact. Aligning with the regional governance structure, the IA's Fono interacts with the CROP HRD WG and provides regular reporting on the implementation progress through the PFU to the SC and subsequently to the PHES and the FEdMM.

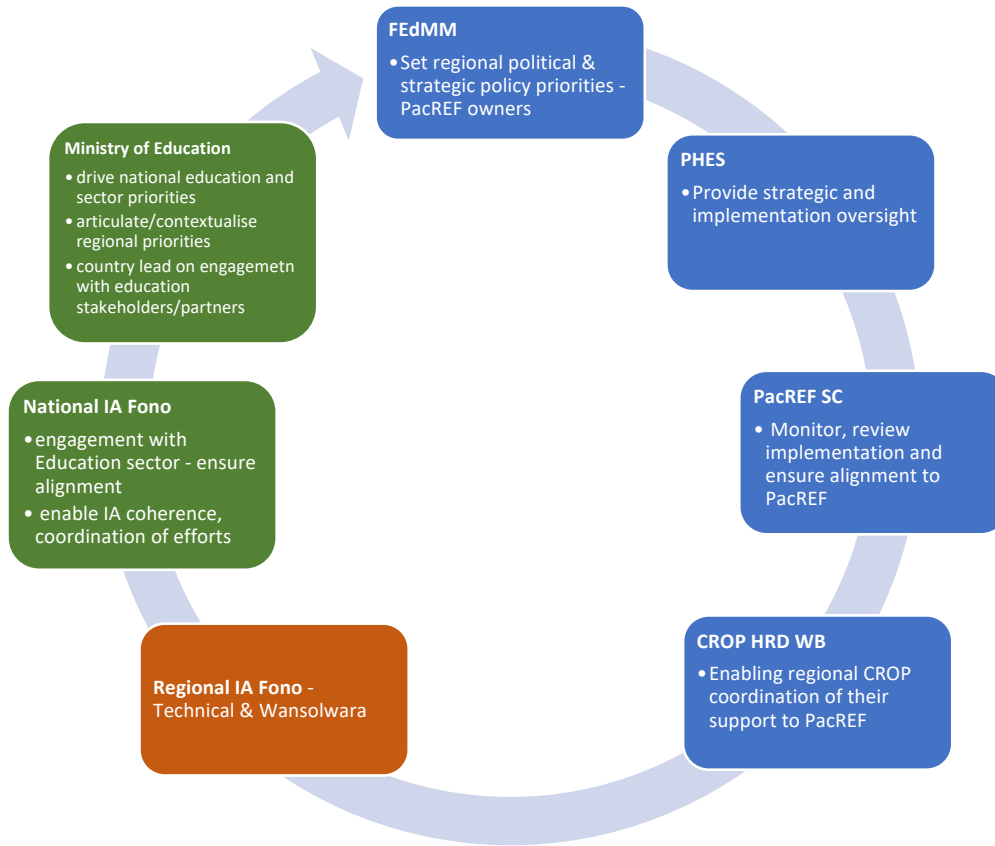
At the national level, the IA Fono complements and supports national/sector level mechanisms to improve education delivery. It assists governments to identify opportunities for learning and addressing difficult service delivery issues and outcome shortfalls. It supports and strengthens country ownership and leadership within the PacREF and works to encourage co-design and planning of activities; the minimization of duplication of effort and incentivizes improved coordination and collaboration. Importantly, the Fono encourages complementarity between DPs' bilateral programmes and the PacREF Programme.

Diagram 2 illustrates the position of the IA's Fono at National and at Regional level and its relationship to supporting existing regional governance and implementation structures at both levels.

²⁷ The PHES at their meeting in Niue in 2019 agreed on the following membership to the Steering Committee: Papua New Guinea representing Melanesian sub-region, Palau representing the Micronesian sub-region, Niue representing the Polynesian sub-region, Kiribati representing the Smaller Island States, and Vanuatu representing the larger island states. The membership is for a period of two years and will rotate among the members of each sub-region every two years.

²⁸ Fono is a term used by Tongans and Samoans. A similar concept is used by the Fijian Lauan as Vono Vanua. Fono refers to a traditional form of gathering that is also a governance system at the village level which provides a space for hearing grievances, giving instructions, and resolving conflict. A Fono is 'chaired' by the chief/noble of the village and is based on principles of respect, reciprocity, humility, relationships and is carried out with the intention of reaching consensus.

Diagram 2: The PacREF Governance Structure



Note: The CSO Forum held on 18th September 2020 agreed to the establishment of a CSO Forum as part of the governance structure as shown above, This has been agreed to by the SC and CROP HRD WG which will then be discussed at the next PHES meeting for final decision.

5 Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

The Programme adopts a three-level approach to MEL:

- one is concerned with compliance tracking, and is led by the PFU,
- one with continuous formative assessment led by EQAP,
- and one with the tracking and reporting Pacific systems' performance.

At each level and across the levels, stakeholders will use a learning lens through which to analyse, interpret and respond to results. Indicators of progress towards achievement targets will comprise a combination of quantitative indicators, trends against baselines, qualitative evidence of changes in behaviour, and evidence of action based on lessons learned. Importantly, the MEL programme also assesses the extent to which the PacREF Programme is improving coordination and cooperation between IAs, between IAs and Pacific ministries of education, and amongst the region's ministries of education.

While overall, EQAP is leading the MEL effort, responsibilities within the MEL are shared. PICs and IAs will provide evidence from their own M&E and reporting mechanisms to support the reporting of progress towards targets and outputs. The PFU will coordinate collation and reporting of monitoring data while EQAP will facilitate learning events, evaluation activities, collection and analysis of data and reporting of progress, impact, lessons learned and success stories throughout the life of the Programme.

The MEL programme recognizes the multiple influences that will affect Programme outcomes and that changes in context may impact implementation and levels of commitment. Although this may be disruptive, it is also viewed as an opportunity to learn as the Programme matures. All significant changes will be captured, documented and become part of the analysis and reporting cycle within the MEL process.

The abridged version of the *PacREF MEL Plan in Annex 8* provides details of the Programme’s monitoring, evaluation and learning agenda and on how MEL will be reported. The Annex includes the Programme’s overall theory of change, the theories of change for each of the four policy areas targeted which lay out the hierarchy of activity outputs, medium term goals, impact and long-term goals, the associated results frameworks, and the Programme specific indicators. *Anticipated intermediate outputs at both the regional and national levels are detailed in the 2020 IRP and in Annex 8.*

5.1 Pacific Systems’ Performance

Box 4 highlights the key performance indicators that assess region-wide progress and national systems’ performance as part of the level 2 and level 3 monitoring processes. While the Programme will not directly influence outcomes in each of the 23 areas assessed by these indicators, it recognizes that these KPIs help build the broad evidence base from which systems performance (including that influenced by the Programme) will be assessed. During Phase 1 the Programme will place emphasis on establishing the priority indicators *italicised* in the box 5.

Box 4 Key Performance Indicators

1 Quality and Relevance

- 1.1 Percentage of primary and secondary schools meeting national minimum service standards
- 1.2 Percentage of primary schools with vernacular instruction in the first three years
- 1.3 Percentage of primary and secondary schools with access to drinking water and basic sanitation
- 1.4 Percentage of primary and secondary schools with access to computers for pedagogical use
- 1.5 *Out-of-school rate for primary, lower and upper secondary education*
- 1.6 Percentage of children in primary and lower secondary schools who are over-age for their grade

2 Learning Pathways

- 2.1 *Participation rate of youth & adults in formal/non-formal education/training in last 12 months*
- 2.2 Gross/Net enrolment rates (GER/NER) in early childhood, primary, secondary & tertiary education
- 2.3 *Participation rate in early childhood education the year before primary education*
- 2.4 Transition rates between primary, secondary and tertiary education
- 2.5 Retention rates in primary & secondary education
- 2.6 *Youth participation rate in technical-vocational education (TVET) programmes*

3 Student Outcomes

- 3.1 Educational attainment rate for secondary, TVET and tertiary education
- 3.2 Percentage of pre-school children that are school ready
- 3.3 *Percentage of primary students achieving proficiency in (English) literacy*
- 3.4 *Percentage of primary students achieving proficiency in (Math) numeracy*
- 3.5 *Gross intake ratio to the last grade (GIRLY) for primary & lower/upper secondary education*
- 3.6 *Completion rate for primary & lower/upper secondary education*

4 Teaching Profession

- 4.1 Percentage of teachers meeting professional standards (competencies) in primary & secondary schools
- 4.2 *Percentage of teachers in primary & secondary schools that are trained*
- 4.3 Percentage of teachers in primary & secondary schools that are qualified
- 4.4 Student - teacher ratios for qualified and trained teachers in primary and secondary schools
- 4.5 Percentage of teachers in primary and secondary schools that are engaged in annual professional development

6 Development of the GPE ESPIG Programme

6.1 Alignment with GPE's Strategic Goals

Box 5: Alignment between GPE's Strategic Goals the PacREF's High-Level Achievement Objectives.

GPE Strategic Goals

Improved and more equitable student learning outcomes through quality teaching and learning.

Increased equity, gender equality and inclusion for all in a full cycle of quality education, targeting the poorest and most marginalized, including by gender, disability, ethnicity and conflict or fragility

Effective and efficient education systems delivering equitable, quality educational services for all.

PacREF High-level Achievement Goals

Establishing upward trends in the percentage of preschool children that are assessed as school-ready when they enter primary school and achieving age appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy at the primary level.

Improving inclusiveness, student wellbeing and the maintenance of Pacific languages, values and traditions.

Laying the foundations necessary to ensure that upward trends can be established in the numbers of well-prepared and appropriately qualified secondary and post-secondary graduates.

The PacREF seeks to promote fully inclusive learning opportunities for all Pacific children and in doing so seeks to empower Pacific people to fully enjoy, without barriers, the benefits of education. It recognizes the disadvantages faced by some groups in accessing opportunities to education, including girls and boys, young man and young women, youth, persons with disabilities, rural communities and minority groups²⁹.

PacREF financed activities that improve data quality, flow and validity as well as to ensure that data collected is appropriately disaggregated by gender, region, etc., are underway and are expected to help inform the regions' decision makers on critical policy issues such as student attraction and retention, ECE provision, teacher deployment, teacher professional development, learning outcomes, school consolidation school maintenance and facility needs. EQAP, UNESCO and IoE will be instrumental in developing Pacific education ministries' data collection, storage, and analysis capacities, while IoE will increasingly use real time regional data sets in policy development exercises in the policy and planning courses they offer to the region's senior education ministry officials.

6.2 Programme Costs

Full details of the Programme costs and proposed financing sources are contained in Part 3 of this Programme Document.

Annex 9 provides comprehensive information on ADB's implementation arrangements as GA, addressing project administration, financial management, procurement and consulting services, IA procurement capacity assessment, project monitoring and evaluation, and ADB's role and responsibilities.

²⁹ The PacREF aligns with the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration in striving towards gender parity in informal, primary, secondary and tertiary education and training. It also supports the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025 and responds to its goal of expanding early intervention and education of children with disabilities.

Table 9 shows the estimated cost of the PacREF Programme over the three-year period 2021 to 2023, the estimated contributions from the IAs and DPs, the ADB’s Programme management and supervision costs, and the Financing Gap (the amount of the estimated Programme costs requested from GPE).

Current IA estimates are that the three-years of Phase 1 of the PacREF Programme discussed in this Programme Document will cost USD 19,138,172 (inclusive of all activity costs, IA management fees, etc., but exclusive of a GA Programme management and supervision cost of USD 544,711).

The Funding Gap is USD 14,997,510, inclusive of GA management and supervision costs.

In addition to the GA management and supervision costs shown in table 9 to be drawn the ESPIG funds, the GA also proposes to utilize USD 169,982 of TA and ADB funds, and USD 106,455 of GPE PDG funds to finance Programme management and supervision.

Table 9 Programme Funding by Source and Financing Gap (USD)

Prog. Year	IA Prog. Costs (1)	Funding from IAs (2)	Funding from MFAT (3)	Funding from other DPs (4)	Total Non-GPE (5=2+3+4)	IA Prog. Financing Gap (6=1-5)	Grant Agent Mgt. Costs (7)	Total Financing Gap (6+7)
2021	5,923,533	2,035,008	1,912,446	125,280	4,072,734	1,850,799	31,890	1,882,689
2022	6,108,977	292,329			292,329	5,816,648	251,666	6,068,314
2023	7,105,662	320,310			320,310	6,785,352	261,155	7,046,507
Total	19,138,172	2,647,647	1,912,466	125,280	4,685,373	14,452,799	544,711	14,997,510

Source: IA activity cost estimates, IA and DP commitments reported to the PFU, and GA estimates of oversight costs

6.3 Financing and the Role of GPE

Currently implementation of Phase 1 of the Programme is financed by Pacific countries through their annual contributions to some IAs by funding from New Zealand (MFAT) and Australia (DFAT) who also contribute to meeting some IAs’ core costs as well as funding specific aspects of USP’s and EQAP’s programmes and by UNICEF and UNESCO, who draw on core and other funding to support initial implementation of select activities.

The Pacific anticipates that the ESPIG will be awarded in late 2020/early2021 and that the ADB, as GA, will distribute funding to the IAs during the first or second quarter of 2021, with GPE-funded Program activities starting prior to July 1 2021. Currently, it is anticipated that at all ESPIG funds received will be expended by the end of 2023 (i.e. half way through the 2023-24 financial year), although, due to Covid-19, it is quite possible that some activities may be rescheduled in each of the programme years for which ESPIG funding is requested.

At this time, the Pacific will not seek funding from GPE’s Multiplier Fund.

6.4 Proposed Financing Modality for ESPIG Funding

GPE funding will be added as ‘co-financing’ to an existing ADB Technical Assistance project (Strengthening Education in the Pacific Region: TA 9645-REG). The paragraphs below provide details of the TA project and how both MFAT and ESPIG funds will be added to project funds already held by the ADB.

6.4.1 TA Project Background Information

ADB approved the TA 9645-REG on 29 November 2018. The TA's outputs are: Output 1: Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) implementation supported; Output 2: regional repository and learning management platform for open, distance, and flexible learning; and Output 3: small assessments, studies, and exchanges to expand knowledge development and program development supported. The TA completion date is 31 December 2023. The TA is administered by ADB, and its implementing agency is the Forum of Education Ministries.

The TA is financed through a \$750,000 grant from ADB's Technical Assistance Special Fund. An increase in TA amount of \$1,000,000, through grants from the Republic of Korea e-Asia and Knowledge Partnership Fund (\$500,000) and the High-Level Technology Fund (\$500,000) to support Output 2 was approved on 12 September 2019. A second increase in TA amount of \$389,875, through a program development grant from GPE, was approved on 7 February 2020. This has increased the total TA amount from its original amount of \$750,000 to \$2,139,875.

The TA's outputs and activities were approved with the assumption that additional partner financing would be committed in the coming years. In particular both the funding from the Government of New Zealand to support Output 1 (PacREF implementation) and a future application for approximately \$15 million to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), were anticipated. The activities under Output 1 will contribute to the four policy priorities of the PacREF namely (i) Quality and Relevance, (ii) Learning Pathways, (iii) Student Outcomes & Wellbeing, and (iv) Teacher Professionalism.

6.4.2 Additional Financing from MFAT

The Government of New Zealand, through MFAT, has agreed to provide an additional grant to the TA of NZD\$4,167,600 (approximately US\$2,756,034), to be administered by ADB, to support additional activities under Output 1. Upon approval, the cumulative TA amount will increase from \$2,139,875 to approximately US\$4,895,909. The approval of the additional financing from MFAT is currently under preparation. The approval process is categorized as major change in scope and implementation arrangements given the proposal to have four implementing agencies (IAs) under Output 1 will substantially change the original implementation arrangements. Accordingly, the approval requires several due diligence and assessments to be undertaken with the IAs including financial management assessment, procurement risk assessment and IDD. These assessments have all been completed with direct involvement of all relevant ADB departments. There are no significant findings from the assessment that will impact the eligibility of the proposed IAs. Low to moderate risks identified will all be addressed through the proposed implementation arrangements with all the IAs. The key remaining steps to be undertaken include finalizing the procurement plan for the proposed consulting, good and non-consulting services under the TA and negotiation of the TA agreement between ADB counsel and IAs' representatives. Selected provisions have already been discussed between ADB and the IAs particularly pertaining to financial management, funds disbursement, procurement and monitoring and evaluation. The approval of the additional financing from MFAT is expected to be obtained by end November 2020.

6.4.3 Additional Financing from GPE

The processing of potential additional financing from GPE is envisaged to be relatively straightforward given that change in TA scope and implementation arrangements to include the proposed IAs would be already approved under the additional financing from MFAT. No major issues are anticipated since the proposed implementation arrangements for both MFAT and GPE funded activities are all in line with ADB policies and regulations. Further, no significant risks have been identified with all the proposed IAs. Nonetheless, the approval request for GPE will still outline the scope of activities to be funded under GPE financing, the total amount of financing approved by GPE and revised cost estimates and financing plan and other provisions, if any, which need to be included resulting from the financing agreement between GPE and ADB. The additional

financing from GPE is targeted for approval within 3 months from the confirmation of GPE funding. The approval will be sought from the ADB president.

6.5 Aid Effectiveness

The PacREF and the PacREF Programme align with aid effectiveness principles, including ownership, harmonization, flexibility, and sustainability. Ownership is strengthened through the strong alignment of the PacREF Agenda with national priorities. The harmonization of programme direction, regional support capacity, national capacity and national need is strengthened through the managed coordination of the IAs, the DPs, and PICs' ministries of education, through the FEEdMM, and through their Heads of Education, the PHES.

FEEdMM owns the PacREF, it is the Pacific Education Ministers' policy. The Programme was determined and designed by their PHES and is implemented in most part by their agencies, USP and SPC. PICs determine the degree of programme flexibility through the Programme's governance structure and through the annual updating of the IRP. The IRP updating process is designed to be fully responsive to gains made, persistent challenges, and to changes in national priorities. Delivering the Programme through their annually reviewed business plans allows the IA's to be responsive to national needs in a way that allows them flexibility while still maintaining an in-line and manageable disbursement and accounting structure.

The ADB funding modality chosen for ESPIG reflects GPE's guidelines: it aligns GPE's co-funding of the ADB's PacREF TA Project with co-financing with other external aid, and with established and in-design DP bilateral and regional investments³⁰.

The Programme supports capacity development and capacity substitution. In countries where ministries are small, have limited human resources with appropriate skills to manage and deliver all necessary aspects of a modern school system, the Programme provides, via the IAs, consistently high-quality targeted skills substitution in areas such as student assessment and teacher training. Where capacity development is the best option to assist in the development of a stronger and effective school system, the IAs will develop and establish professional development programmes.

PacREF's commitment to the longer term, to working with and through the region's own agencies, to being embedded in the business plans and budgeting processes of those agencies, and to using the existing regional education architecture, including the FEEdMM and the PHES, to guide and oversee the Programme, signal that a significant investment is being made in ensuring sustainability of outputs. Ongoing assessment of the continual relevance of the RGs will further enhance their value and a sustained region-wide continuation of their use.

In line with aid effectiveness principles, the PacREF Programme is demand-led and well supported by all stakeholders: it responds to 15 Pacific countries' self-defined and shared challenges, it aligns well with DPs' bilateral education programs and has the support of a wide range of regional education stakeholders, including the regional civil society forum.

Constructive consultations with Regional Local Education Group (the LEG that consists of the six contributing countries and the CROP HRD WG) and its individual members have taken place regularly throughout the PacREF Programme design process – directly and indirectly, formally and informally, either via the PFU, the IAs or via the IA Fono. There has also been consistent engagement with the PacREF SC – a committee that acts on behalf of the all 15 PacREF participating countries. *The Table 1 in Annex 1 of Part II of the PD illustrates*

³⁰ The GPE ESPIG guidelines indicate that “In countries (regions) with an operational joint financing mechanism (pooled fund), GPE financing will be expected to co-fund.” <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/global-partnership-education-program-implementation-grant-guidelines> (Chapter II.3, Modalities, page 6)

the frequency of the formal consultations over the last two years while the GPE's formal application form for the PacREF ESPIG confirms the support of the six contributing countries.

6.6 Lessons Learned

6.6.1 Lessons from the First Year of PacREF implementation

Programme implementation over the last 12 months revealed that in-country awareness of the PacREF Programme varies across the region. While a similar lesson was noted in the review of the PEDF, there was an expectation that, as the PacREF Programme design was country led, there would be a high level of awareness within countries and that would ensure a broader understanding of the Programme within and around the sector.

While planning in-country activities, the IAs noted that the PacREF was understood and well-supported at the minister and head of system level, but information about the long-term sector-support programme had not always been extensively shared across ministries and other relevant institutions. It appears that a large part of the reason for this was that the 2019 IRP had not been clearly enough aligned with the four Policy Areas that the Pacific's education ministers had agreed to and that better reflected their individual national ESPs. The 2020 IRP reverts to programming around and within the Policy Areas.

Over the coming years, the IAs and the PFU, working through the PacREF governance structure and through each countries' PacREF Focal Points, will engage with different levels of each countries' sector leadership to ensure a wide appreciation of the Programme, its links to each national ESP, and to develop a broad-based ministry-wide understanding of how the PacREF Programme will continually contribute to ministries' efforts to improve the quality of schooling and to elevate student outcomes.

6.6.2 Lessons from the recent GPE-supported Caribbean Regional Programme

Drawing from the World Bank's Implementation Completion and Results Report "Support to implementation of the Regional Education Strategy"³¹, the Pacific have recognised and applied a number of useful lessons from the GPE-supported OECS regional education programme.

Included in the report's review of key factors during preparation was *"Accordingly, implementation arrangements were intended to work within the capacity constraints in the MOEs in the Project countries, where the small size of the ministries required multi-tasking by limited staff. Project management was centred in the OECS Commission's EDMU, which already worked with the Member States and had successfully implemented a range of operations, rather than creating an additional unit to support Project implementation. This design streamlined implementation, ensured ownership, and contributed to capacity-building, but lack of a dedicated project implementation unit and capacity constraints of existing staff contributed to implementation delays and the need to create additional support structures during implementation."* While the Pacific has an in-place PFU, it is still securing its role in the wide Pacific regional education architecture and securing its capacity in terms of its ability to work most effectively with the IAs, the PacREF governance structure, and the participating countries. In light of the OECS experience, the PFU has revisited its roles and responsibilities and has highlighted to USP, the other IA's and GA and CA the need to assure that its responsibilities are widely understood and accepted and that it has the necessary in-house 'resident' capacity to not only meet its defined responsibilities but also to be able to handle unanticipated events and challenges as these are to be expected over the course of the Programme and to

³¹ 'Implementation Completion and Results Report' on a small recipient-executed trust fund to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) for the support to implementation of the Regional Education Strategy, March, 2020, The World Bank.

take on an increasing important role in shaping the regional education agenda and programming as the PacREF matures.

Speaking to participating countries implementation capacities, the report noted the importance of *“Realistically assess(ing) implementation capacity at the project planning stage and include(ing) mitigating strategies to ensure effective implementation.”* While the PacREF’s PFU and IAs are aware of their own capacities and each has a strategy that speaks to how and when those capacities will be strengthened to meet Programme demands, a detailed assessment of participating countries overall ministry capacities and capacity shortfalls has not been prepared. While this is not thought necessary from the perspective of Programme implementation as all five IAs are extremely familiar with the national ministries they are working with under PacREF, it now is recognised that there is value in securing ministerial level appreciation of the depth and range of capacity shortfalls across the Pacific. For the obvious reasons of high levels of political/national sensitivities the PFU will restrict circulation of the well-edited paper on the issue as vehicle for the FEEdMM members to identify those areas where countries could, through PacREF’s South-South programme, directly assist other nations. This exercise will emphasize the vital role that PacREF’s in-country focal points, PacREF’s M&E, and the IA Fono³² can play in assessing how national capacities are developing.

Importantly, the OECS experience has reminded the Pacific to *“Consider and consult the end user when developing deliverables and timelines. At times, the pace of implementation was also too fast for direct beneficiaries to assimilate the Project interventions.”* Although the PFU and the IAs had held numerous consultations with countries (through the PHES and with MoE officials concerning needed RGs and national priorities, deliverables and timelines, and PacREF alignment with national education plans, they have decided to plan for IA-led consultations with end-users and intended/ actual RG beneficiaries as PacREF activities progress and especially as RGs are contextualized. These are being now prepared as part of an ongoing strategy to ensure the RGs’ continual ‘relevance and fit’ at the country level.

6.7 The 2019 Independent Appraisal of PacREF

An independent appraisal and review of the PacREF, the 2019 IRP plan and budget for regional implementation activities and the MEL Plan was commissioned by New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and submitted to the PFU and the GA in late 2019. While the appraisal’s summary recommendation was that *“This appraisal demonstrates that the policy settings and strategies of PacREF are sound, but that focus should be given to ensuring that it is implemented and monitored effectively”*, it also provided 13 specific recommendations to help achieve that objective. The Independent Appraisal, its 13 recommendations and details of how they were addressed by the in the draft PacREF package and Programme Document were shared with GPE as part of the Pacific’s GPE QAR 2 submission (see 3.9 below).

6.8 GPE’s QAR 2 Review of the Draft PacREF Package and Program Document

In mid-2020 the GPE Secretariat reviewed drafts of the Pacific’s submissions of the Regional Education Sector Plan), the 2020 update of the PacREF Implementation Plan (the IRP), the PacREF Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan (The MEL Plan), Program Document and Application Form among other documents. That review resulted in 14 recommendations for consideration. The Pacific have responded positively to all 14 and have provided GPE with a memo that explains the Pacific’s response to each recommendation as part of the current ESPIG application package.

7 Sustainability

A high level of sustainability is anticipated because PacREF is a regional policy shaped by the region’s education ministers to respond their needs. The PacREF Programme is a PHES-designed strategy to operationalize the PacREF policy. It is designed to strengthen their systems’ capacities to deliver better outcomes.

³² Fono is a Pacific term for Forum or meeting. PacREF adopts Pacific terminology to contextualize it to the Pacific context.

Improving the quality of learning is the key priority of FEdMM. A large majority of the funding that is committed to the Programme, including that from GPE, will go towards activities that develop and embed tools that will strengthen system capacity to improve learning outcomes. As the Programme is implemented wholly within the IAs' business plans, the recurrent requirements of RG support are already internally housed in IAs' programming; and this allows for an increased probability of continuity as the region's ministers and their heads of education systems are those that steer the direction of those agencies' forward programming. Each of these elements contributes to the likelihood of continued use of the RGs that the programme will introduce and help embed in each participating countries' education systems.

8 Risks

Overall, the risk of the PacREF Programme being poorly implemented or not meeting its objectives is **moderate**. This rating primarily reflects a balance between two facts: one, that experience dictates that activities that seek to change entrenched practices and systems within education systems are inherently challenging, and, two, that the IAs are the best-placed institutions to draw on evidence of good practice and to apply their Pacific experiences to mitigate risks as they arise.

The political and sector strategy risks are rated **moderate** – The 'quality of education' agenda enjoys broad-based political support across the Pacific region. FEdMM is committed to PacREF, the PHES have committed to support the PacREF Programme delivery in their systems and the regions' DPs and civil society forum have endorsed the PacREF and its IRP, and the DPs will over time align their bilateral programming to support the PacREF Programme. While the risk of the PacREF Program being halted is low, the risk of delays or slower than anticipated progress is present, as it is in most Pacific-based development activity and cannot be ignored, particularly during this unpredictable Covid period: without doubt, **Programme implementation will be intermittently and adversely affected by localized, regional or global disasters such as floods and cyclones, or the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic**. Financial losses and delays may occur as a result of local, regional or global setbacks, large and small, and are, as always in the Pacific, anticipated.

The risk of any IA failing to meet their PacREF commitments is **low**, particularly as PacREF supports a strengthening of their already reasonable skills base and overall capacity. However, although the IAs make every effort to ensure that their staff and systems capacity is at the required levels, rapidly increasing country demand for their services and support can result in temporary delays in implementation.

There is a **moderate** stakeholder risk associated with how the Pacific's education systems, teachers and school leaders will adjust to the new tools and mechanisms that PacREF will promote, such as teacher competency assessments. Although efforts will focus on mitigating these risks by ensuring strong stakeholder participation in the preparation, implementation and contextualization processes, only time will tell how individual institutions' and individuals' behaviours adjust.

While the country Capacity risk is **high**, the risk of countries under-utilising the RGs is **low** – While the IAs will maintain their practice of close collaboration with partner countries, there is a significant risk that countries' technical capacities will result in Programme implementation progressing at varying rates, although additional resources will be available to help ensure that countries move at the same pace, as far as possible, and to help achieve the economies of scale that the Programme seeks to achieve. However, regardless of country capacity, as the RGs will be contextualised for use in each country, there will be ongoing and appropriate accommodations made by the IAs during the contextualisation processes to ensure that each RG is adapted to suit ministries' capacity to utilise the RG effectively.

Sustainability presents a **moderate** risk – While it is not possible to ensure that all the RGs (PacREF's outputs) are universally adopted or adapted across the region, considerable efforts will be made to ensure that the

that countries determine they can usefully apply are fully contextualizing and embedding into their education systems through PacREF financing, national financing or through the bilateral programmes of development partners.

Fiduciary risk is **low** – Strong oversight arrangements, performance-based financing, and the strong fiduciary practices required and overseen by the ADB are expected to keep this risk level low. It is widely recognised by the relevant actors that non-compliance with agreed financial management and procurement practices would severely impact Programme implementation. Although the risk associated with acts of fraud or corruption is regarded as **low**, it is recognised that any such action would cause serious damage to the image of PacREF as framework that is unifying a regional education agenda across the region’s professional agencies and its countries.

Annex 10 contains a comprehensive risk register and addresses how each risk will be mitigated.

9 Stakeholders

Nineteen stakeholder groups are identified: the participating countries’ ministers of education (FEdMM), the PacREF Steering Committee and the Local Education Group (LEG – consisting of the CROP HRD WG and the six contributing countries representatives), the heads of the Pacific’s education systems (PHES), PacREF country focal points, MoE staff, non-education ministries, teacher training institutions, teacher unions, teachers, school leaders, school inspectorates, qualification agencies, NGOs, CSOs and advocacy groups, parents and communities, the PFU, the IAs, and development partners.

The PFU and IAs recognize that there is an essential need over the first years of the PacREF Programme to establish a cohesive and active consultation and engagement process with all stakeholders as well as a shared understanding of and commitment to the Programme.

Annex 11 provides an analysis of what is important to each stakeholder group, how they can contribute to the PacREF Programme, how they could block or hinder Programme progress and the PFU’s and IAs’ strategy for engaging with each group.