

# Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development Terms of Reference (ToR)

October 2019



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# Terms of Reference

## **Vision**

All young children across the Pacific reach their full potential, so they can create a good future for themselves, their nation and the region.

## **Mission**

PRC4ECD will guide and strengthen a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to early childhood development (ECD) across the Pacific to ensure that every child and his/her parents have access to a full package of quality services to support early childhood development.

PRC4ECD's mandate stems from a call made by Pacific Forum Leaders at their meeting in 2018 in the Republic of Nauru for "a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach at the national level to address NCDs (non-communicable diseases), childhood obesity, stunting and early childhood development."

### **PASIFIKA CALL TO ACTION ON ECD**

1. Develop and strengthen national systems on holistic ECD through a coordinating multisectoral mechanism for the development and review of legislation and policies, coordination of budget allocation and provision of quality services for young children while ensuring the inclusion of the 0–3 age group and children with special needs.
2. Incorporate ECD into national development plans with clear implementation mechanisms including cost effective, innovative and scalable interventions.
3. Articulate the roles and responsibilities of each Ministry, the lead agency for ECD, and mechanisms for interagency collaboration.
4. Increase government investment in ECD through recurrent budgets, with the goal of gradually increasing to accept international benchmarks.
5. Improve coordination between government and non-government stakeholders who contribute to ECD.
6. Provide the requisite resources (including adequate compensation, improved working conditions, the sharing of best practice and knowledge and competency frameworks) to professionalize the ECD workforce.
7. Promote parents, community, and other stakeholders' awareness of the importance of ECD.
8. Develop, strengthen and use comprehensive data management, monitoring and assessment systems for informed decisions on early childhood.
9. Encourage development partners to increase and harmonize assistance to support regional and national implementation of ECD related priorities.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE PRC4ECD**

The foundation of the Pacific region's human capital is developed in the early years. When governments invest in their young, they are better able to realize human rights, reduce inequality, and prevent deprivation, paving the way for inclusive social development and equitable economic growth. The early years are critical because it is a period of rapid brain development, which is the foundation for all future learning, behaviour and health.

At the 49th Pacific Islands Forum in Nauru, "leaders expressed alarm at the increasing incidence of childhood obesity and stunting, particularly its impact on future generations of Pacific people." Leaders committed to "a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach" at the national level to address NCD's, childhood obesity and ECD. This aligns with the Pacific region's tracking of progress on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, given that ECD is a key target in the SDGs and has multiplier effects across most of the development goals.

The agenda on ECD in the Pacific also stems from commitments made in the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD, which was endorsed by 15 Pacific island countries at the 2017 Pacific ECD Conference in Fiji. The conference was attended by a total of 135 participants, comprised of senior officials in Ministries of Education, Finance, Health, and Social Welfare from Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The Pasifika Call to Action on ECD lays out critical national efforts to secure the optimal development of young children.

Recognising the need for a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to ECD, the Executive Board of the Pacific Regional Council For Early Childhood Care and Education (PRC4ECCE) agreed to transition to a multi-sectoral council - PRC4ECD - and be the body to take forward regional priorities on ECD, including implementation of the Pasifika Call to Action for ECD. The focus of the PRC4ECCE has been on the preparation of children for school readiness as they enter formal schooling, particularly the 3 to 5 - year old age group. The decision to take a more holistic approach towards children's development is well established by scientific and empirical evidence. The decision to transition to PRC4ECD was endorsed by the Forum of Education Ministers Meeting (FEEdMM) in Nauru in 2018, which was the governing body for PRC4ECCE.

UNICEF, as acting Secretariat of PRC4ECCE and the lead United Nations agency on the realization of children's rights, convened an inter-governmental ECD Task Force to oversee the transition of PRC4ECCE to PRC4ECD. It was comprised of Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Education, Finance, Health and Social Welfare from the Pacific countries of Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. On 27-28 June 2019, an ECD Task Force meeting was convened by UNICEF, hosted at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). The Task Force agreed that UNICEF and PIFS will draft a ToR for PRC4ECD, which will include the details on the mandate, functions, structure and membership of the Council and will disseminate the ToR to Pacific island countries for their feedback and input, after which the ToR will be endorsed at the 2019 Pacific ECD Forum in Fiji.

At the inaugural regional conference on ECD in 2017, Pacific governments also committed to an action agenda on ECD – the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD (see summary on page 4 and complete text of the Call to Action in Annex) – and called for multi-sectoral mechanisms for coordination.

At their 2018 meeting in Nauru, Forum Education Ministers “recognized the Pasifika Call for Action as a pathway towards school readiness for Pacific children and agreed for the (Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education (PRC4ECCE) to become the Pacific Regional Council for ECD emphasizing the importance of multi-sectoral coordination to ensure children have the best start in life and are able to learn successfully in school.”

PRC4ECD will support the Pacific in the fulfillment of its commitments to the 2030 global development agenda. ECD is a priority in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with SDG target 4.2 asking from nations that “by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.” ECD is also contained in the other SDGs: target 2.2 for nutrition, target 3.2 for health, and target 16.2 for protection and peace. Furthermore, ECD has multiplier effects across all the other SDGs, contributing to poverty alleviation, gender equality, and the reduction of inequality.

PRC4ECD will be a multisectoral inter-governmental body comprised of senior government representatives from sectors of education, finance, health and social welfare. It will represent 15 Pacific Island Countries and territories: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

A key purpose of PRC4ECD will be to activate, support and monitor implementation of the nine-point agenda of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD.

## Core Values

PRC4ECD will continue to support the Pacific region’s vision for a “region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy and productive lives”, recognizing the role of ECD in achieving these outcomes. PRC4ECD will promote collaboration, cooperation and harmonization, adopting a spirit of partnership across government ministries, especially agencies like education, health, social welfare and finance, civil society partners, and other relevant stakeholders. It will continue to promote approaches to ECD that are uniquely ‘Pacific’ and build on the existing capabilities and needs of Pacific Island nations.

PRC4ECD will practice good governance and emulate the values of equity, transparency, integrity, and sustainability. It will promote open and transparent decision-making using consultative and participatory approaches and prioritize tools and approaches that are cutting edge, fit-for-purpose and culturally appropriate to the Pacific.

PRC4ECD will focus on the best interests of the child, family and community. PRC4ECD recognizes the role of parents as the primary caregivers of children and will support parents, guardians and families in providing nurturing care for their young. PRC4ECD also prioritizes the needs and respects the rights of the most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities.

# Roles and Functions

**The function of the Council will be to** provide advice on strategic direction, guidance and policy support on ECD in the region.

The Steering Committee will be delegated the following six main functions of the PRC4ECD, in support of national initiative and primarily advisory in nature. These functions are:

1. **Regional coordination, collaboration and reporting on ECD:** It will support systems strengthening on ECD and the establishment of national coordination mechanisms within government leadership structures and downwards to communities, where required.

The PRC4ECD will also promote ECD as a regional priority and support its inclusion in regional agendas and monitoring frameworks. PRC4ECD will seek to provide reports on ECD utilizing existing regional reporting mechanisms and processes to Pacific Leaders including, but not limited to, the Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEEdMM), Forum Economic and Finance Ministers (FEMM), Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, liaising closely with the respective Secretariats to the above forums. There are many complexities associated with a multi-sectoral approach to ECD and PRC4ECD will support additional or alternative reporting duties.

2. **Advocacy and networking:** PRC4ECD will support the development of a holistic agenda for ECD through dynamic advocacy and networking activities. It will also build and support a base of ECD champions to increase momentum on ECD at a political level and develop a network of change levers across society to support progress on ECD. PRC4ECD will explore and maximize partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including public, private and civil society stakeholders. Whenever possible, PRC4ECD will support the convening of these ECD stakeholders for collaborative discussions and action on ECD, as necessary.

3. **Knowledge-sharing and capacity-building: Recognizing the value of knowledge-sharing and capacity building and attentive to the different needs and priorities that each country approaches ECD,** PRC4ECD commits to providing platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity-building across and within countries. PRC4ECD commits to providing valuable technical information and tools on ECD, including but not limited to policy briefs, advocacy materials and other relevant materials to the implementation and monitoring of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD. The PRC4ECD will also promote the design and dissemination of evidence-based programmes on ECD.

PRC4ECD will utilize relevant national, regional and international partner agencies with technical competence for input and support. It will also promote collective self-reliance through South-South cooperation within the Pacific.

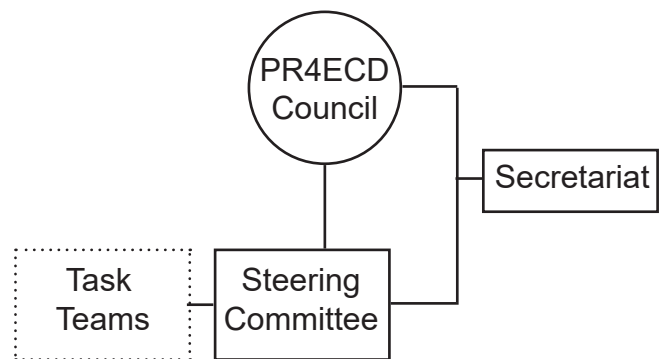
4. **Results-based monitoring:** PRC4ECD will support the tracking of ECD services against the National Development Plans, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and regional policy frameworks, noting that there are existing indicators on ECD across various frameworks in the Pacific, including, for example, the Pacific Sustainable Development Roadmap, the Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework, and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) and national development plans. The role of PRC4ECD will be to consolidate these indicators to report on progress on ECD in general. It may also conduct a mapping of all existing indicators from the existing frameworks and consider data gaps in terms of ECD indicators. (add support to national data collection efforts on ECD)

PRC4ECD’s key functions would be to monitor implementation of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD. It will develop and disseminate annual regional reports on ECD and use the evidence from these reports to support regional and country-specific planning to advance ECD outcomes.

5. **Resourcing and financing:** PRC4ECD will seek to provide support to the relevant sectors in countries with technical assistance to prepare country costing, budgets and identify gaps in provision. It will also seek to provide support for resource mobilization and facilitate the harmonization of financial support on ECD across donors and partners. PRC4ECD will, where appropriate, leverage partnership opportunities to enhance and share resources with all stakeholders.
6. **Quality management:** PRC4ECD will provide support to the development of quality standards for ECD services to be monitored at country level with a view to ensuring quality across the region. The goal will be to ensure that children and their families are provided with a guaranteed minimum level of quality. This will include support, as necessary, to registration and accreditation processes for the ECD workforce, curriculum, facilities and services. PRC4ECD will, as necessary, support the design of pathways, tools and mechanisms to strengthen institutional capacity for ECD.

## Structure

PRC4ECD will constitute the full Council, supported by a Steering Committee and a Secretariat (see figure on the right).



### Full Council

The Council members of PRC4ECD will be at least two Ministers - one from the Ministry of Finance, and at least one from the social sector (Ministries of Health, Education, and the Ministry responsible for Social Welfare). These Council members will be not be more than four Ministers from each of the 15 Pacific island countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

All members of the Council will have full decision-making rights. These members will be expected to jointly represent the interests of the Pacific region.

The Full Council will elect their own Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

### Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will be at least two Permanent Secretaries or CEOs- one from the Ministry of Finance, and at least one from the social sector (Ministries of Health, Education and



the Ministry responsible for Social Welfare). These Steering Committee members will be not more than four from each of the 15 PICTs.

All positions in the Steering Committee will have voting rights. The Steering Committee will also have a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson to oversee and guide the deliberations of the Steering Committee and to ensure that decisions taken are actionable and are in line with the functions and values of PRC4ECD. The Steering Committee can decide to rotate the Chairperson and Vice-chairperson positions across the countries annually.

To strengthen links between the Pacific and the broader Asia-Pacific region, ARNEC, which is the primary ECD network in Asia-Pacific, has allocated one seat at its Steering Committee for PRC4ECD. The Chairperson or Vice-chairperson of the PRC4ECD Steering Committee will be automatically nominated to sit on the Steering Committee of ARNEC, starting in 2020.

### **Secretariat**

The Secretariat role will be primarily to coordinate and provide administrative support for the council and steering committee functions. Some of the specific tasks are:

- Preparation and submission of reports to the Steering Committee and/or the Council;
- Convene and facilitate meetings;
- Prepare meeting reports, papers, and other relevant documents;
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of the Council workplan and decisions;
- Support resource mobilization and fundraising for ECD meetings, events, and activities;
- Undertake communication and updates to stakeholders on ECD;
- Other tasks, as directed by the Steering Committee.

UNICEF will remain the Secretariat of PRC4ECD in recognition of UNICEF's mandate for the rights of children and its leading role in promoting ECD in the region. UNICEF will hold the position of Secretariat, as necessary.

### **Task Teams**

Whenever necessary, the Council may choose to form and convene task teams and appoint task team leaders from within the Council to lead on key or emerging priorities on ECD. These will be defined as needed to support the overall mandate and action plan of PRC4ECD. The task teams will be guided by Terms of Reference that detail their specific deliverables, timelines, and other working modalities, including sunset clauses. The task teams may report to the Steering Committee or the Full Council, as necessary.

The Council will establish Task Teams which shall be technical in nature and responsible for translating policy decisions by the Council into regional actions that support national efforts in ECD, as intended by the Council. (Such an example of the Task Team is the PRC4ECCE to be renamed as the Pacific Regional Taskforce on early childhood care and education (ECCE) within the education sector.) The Task team will report to the Council through the Steering Committee on progress of their work and specific recommendations for decisions. The Taskforces may also report through the regional sectoral architecture such as the officials and ministerial forums through the Council.

## Working Mechanisms

Given the multi-sectoral, multi-country scope of the PRC4ECD, the Council will prioritize inclusive, participatory, and consultative processes to determine priorities, decisions, strategies and activities. Its workplan must be owned and led by Pacific island countries with the support and involvement of all stakeholders.

**Decisions will be taken by consensus. If not possible,** voting will require the following quorum to make voting decisions:

- Steering Committee: Fifty percent plus one of its membership present and voting, with all sub-regions represented
- Full Council: Fifty percent plus one of its membership present and voting.

Council members may delegate an alternate to attend meetings, in which case voting rights pass automatically to the country representative in attendance at meetings.

After checking with the Chair, the Secretariat shall distribute minutes via email of each meeting to Steering Committee or Council members within 14 working days of the date of the meeting. If within 14 days of the issue of the minutes, no objection has been raised to these minutes, they shall be considered adopted. Objection/comments must be raised, in writing or via email to the Secretariat, who will correct the minutes and circulate the amended version to the members, after checking with the Chair.

#### **Ten-year workplan, with milestones (2019-2029)**

PRC4ECD, through support of the Steering Committee and Secretariat will design a ten-year workplan, with two-year milestones and budget, to carry out its functions in regional coordination and collaboration on ECD, advocacy and networking, knowledge-sharing and capacity building, results-based monitoring, resource mobilization and financing, and quality management. The Secretariat will report on the progress towards implementing this workplan to the Steering Committee and/or the Full Council, who will evaluate progress and milestones and re-direct the workplan, as necessary. A key milestone will be reporting on ECD as part of the quadrennial report of SDGs in 2022.

PRC4ECD, as directed by the 2017 Pacific ECD Conference, is also tasked to support implementation and monitoring of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD. This will be its main priority in its first multi-year workplan.

While the work of the Council will primarily be regional, it will also support the implementation and monitoring of ECD targets at country level. To facilitate this, PRC4ECD will work with members to establish national ECD coordinating mechanisms, where they do not already exist. These coordination agencies support the participation of national stakeholders in the workings of PRC4ECD and will be a vital element to deeper understanding of national concerns, a means of data collection, and the dissemination of information.

#### **Meetings**

The PRC4ECD Steering Committee will meet yearly. The Full Council will meet at least once every two years. Venues for these forums will be hosted by member countries on a rotating basis. Due to cost implications, maximum effort should be made to hold these meetings on the margins of other big fora and explore virtual meetings, as appropriate.

# Annex

## Pasifika Call to Action on ECD

### PREAMBLE

We, Ministers of the Education, Health, Social Services and Finance sectors, and our senior government representatives from 15 Pacific Island Countries, gathered in Nadi, Fiji, from 19 to 21 September 2017 for the first Conference on “Moving Forward with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Early Childhood”, organized by UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education;

1. Recognize the vast diversity and complexity in the Pacific region and note that this call to action represents a unified vision for the holistic development of our young children.
2. Recognize that parents, families and communities are critical to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the Pacific and therefore our actions must be supportive and reflective of their contexts including appropriate traditional and cultural practices, and their aspirations for our youngest children.
3. Recognize that investments in ECD are vital for individuals and societies to reach their full potential. Accordingly, we endorse the development targets for young children embodied in the SDGs and particularly SDG Goal 4, “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning” and SDG Target 4.2., which calls for all member countries to ensure that “by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.” Furthermore, we recognize that ECD is reflected across the other SDGs, with multiplier effects that help fulfill global, regional and national goals related to poverty, hunger, nutrition, environment, social and emotional development, health and well-being, gender equality, work and economic growth, inequality, sustainable living, and peace.
4. And therefore after considerable discussion at this conference, we adopt this call to action.

## ECD AS THE FOUNDATION OF INCLUSIVE PROSPERITY FOR ALL

### **Evidence on benefits of ECD investments**

1. Neuroscience and Child Development
  - a. Neuroscience evidence indicates immense benefits of positive early life experiences, and evidence is also clear that quality ECD services contribute to cognitive capital.
  - b. High-quality ECD systems and programs contribute to lifelong achievements and improved socio-economic outcomes.
  
2. Economic Benefits
  - a. Investments in holistic ECD yield attractive benefits. In best-case scenarios, US\$1 invested in ECD can yield a return as high as US\$17.
  - b. High returns have been consistently delivered across a range of contexts, with average annual rates of return of 13.7 percent.
  - c. Long-term studies show that early interventions can increase individual's future earnings by of up to 25 per cent.
  
3. Sociocultural Benefits
  - a. Investments in holistic ECD yield social returns.
  - b. Experts underscore the importance during the early years of 'nurturing care' that encompasses health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and early learning and is a vital ingredient in high-quality ECD.
  - c. Especially in the Pacific this involves learnings and focus on family and community based care and traditional social settings.

## CHALLENGES IN THE PACIFIC REGION

### **Significant challenges exist in the provision of quality services for young children**

- Across the region, an alarming 70 per cent of 3–5 year-olds do not have access to pre-primary or preschool education. An average of 25 children for every 1,000 live births die before reaching the age of five. Around 38.3 per cent of children in the Pacific are stunted. Some countries struggle to develop and/or implement protection frameworks and systems. Also, there is a gap in many countries for 0–3 age group interventions.
- Existing legislations and policies on ECD are usually limited in scope or mandate. Most governments do not prioritize ECD in their social and economic sector development plans. Public investment is very low and fails to meet international benchmarks.
- There is limited awareness and understanding amongst communities and stakeholders on the importance of ECD to the future of countries, communities and individuals.

## ACTION AGENDA FOR PACIFIC ISLAND GOVERNMENTS TO ACHIEVE SDG TARGETS FOR ECD

Pacific leaders in endorsing the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development commit to focusing their national as well as regional collective efforts to ensure that “no one is left behind” and requisite resources are secured. All actions for ECD will build on existing positive cultural, family and national strengths.

We hereby submit the following action items that will, in conjunction with Pacific regional framework for education, finance, social welfare and health, contribute towards the realization of SDG Target 4.2 in order to prepare our youngest citizens to be happy,

healthy and successful learners, and pave the way for more equitable, inclusive, gender responsive and sustainable social and economic prosperity across Pacific Island Countries:

1. Develop and strengthen national systems on holistic ECD through a coordinating multisectoral mechanism for the development and review of legislation and policies, coordination of budget allocation and provision of quality services for young children while ensuring the inclusion of the 0–3 age group and children with special needs.
2. Incorporate ECD into national development plans with clear implementation mechanisms including cost effective, innovative and scalable interventions.
3. Articulate the roles and responsibilities of each Ministry, the lead agency for ECD, and mechanisms for interagency collaboration.
4. Increase government investment in ECD through recurrent budgets, with the goal of gradually increasing to accept international benchmarks.
5. Improve coordination between government and non-government stakeholders who contribute to ECD.
6. Provide the requisite resources (including adequate compensation, improved working conditions, the sharing of best practice and knowledge and competency frameworks) to professionalize the ECD workforce.
7. Promote parents, community, and other stakeholders' awareness of the importance of ECD.
8. Develop, strengthen and use comprehensive data management, monitoring and assessment systems for informed decisions on early childhood.
9. Encourage development partners to increase and harmonize assistance to support regional and national implementation of ECD related priorities.

#### **Monitoring the Call to Action**

- Monitor the progress of the Call to Action every two years following this conference, primarily through the development of a monitoring framework that would monitor the status of ECD in the Pacific and reporting it at relevant forums.
- PRC4ECCE will develop a detailed implementation plan, a meeting schedule, identify accountability, and monitoring mechanisms. Results and learnings from these actions will be shared in relevant regional and global public forums and platforms.







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