

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

4th MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

(Koror, Palau, 18 November 2005)

**THEME: YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR A SECURE, PROSPEROUS
AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

ABSTRACT

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide members with a brief overview of the issues facing the young people¹ of the Pacific today and to help guide the discussions on the theme for the 4th meeting of the Conference of the Pacific Community agreed to by the host for this year's Conference, the Republic of Palau which is - **Youth Empowerment for a secure, prosperous and sustainable future**.
2. Underpinning this theme is the realisation and acceptance that having a Pacific region that is peaceful, harmonious, secure, prosperous where its people lead free and worthwhile lives² is not going to be achieved without the involvement and empowerment of young people in all our countries and territories. The challenge lies not in 'whether to involve' but in 'how to effectively engage, involve and empower' young people to participate in nation building for our collective future.

SETTING THE SCENE

3. About 20 per cent³ of the total population of Pacific Island countries and territories (8.7 million people) are aged between 15 and 24 years old. This translates to approximately 1.7 million youths, 53 per cent of whom are females. Expanding the age group to between 10 and 24 year olds, the proportion increases to 31 per cent, or 2.7 million people. If we go from 0 to 24 years, we suddenly hit the 60 per cent mark. The following table briefly summarises the changes in the 15 – 24 and 10 – 24 year old populations between 2005 and 2020⁴.

¹ The term '*Young people*' is used interchangeably in this paper with youth (although they have different age groupings) basically because 'youth' is quite impersonal and does not connect easily with 'people' whereas 'young people' does.

² Pacific Forum Leaders vision – the Auckland Declaration, April, 2004

³ Pacific Population Estimates by Age and sex: 2000 – 2020 – SPC Demography programme

⁴ Pacific Population Estimates by Age and sex: 2000 – 2020 – SPC Demography programme

Age Group	2005	2010	2015	2020
15 – 24 year olds	1,716,607	1,892,319	2,086,018	2,299,544
<i>% of total pop.</i>	<i>20 %</i>	<i>20 %</i>	<i>20 %</i>	<i>20 %</i>
10 – 24 year olds	2,757,564	3,038,707	3,359,751	3,692,633
<i>% of total pop.</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>31%</i>
Total Population	8,785,478	9,684,763	10,676,100	11,768,911

4. Based on these population scenarios we know that whilst the percentage increases in the various age groups examined here remain constant as a result of similar increases in the total population, the bottom line is that numbers of people will actually increase. We also know that in 10 years time, the total population of the Pacific region is going to increase by approximately 2 million people resulting in a Pacific population of about 10.7 million people. And we also know that the resources in all our countries and territories are not going to grow, in-fact for some PICTs they will actually decrease. This demonstrates a scenario where more people will have to share the same level or less resources than we currently enjoy today.

5. At the rate of recent population growth, the region’s population is expected to double in size in 28 years. Obvious implications of this growth mean growing and sustained pressures on land, the provision of services and infrastructure, such as health and education, water supply and access to employment outside traditional occupations for a growing number of young and, relatively more educated people with aspirations beyond village-based and family-oriented agricultural and fishing activities. This is of particular concern in the more populated countries throughout Melanesia, which unlike most Micronesian and Polynesian countries and territories do not enjoy historical migration outlets to metropolitan countries such as New Zealand, Australia and the US, to deflect sustained population pressures on small land areas and fragile ecosystems⁵

6. Understanding the population dynamics of our young people over the next ten to fifteen years is very important to put into perspective the challenges facing them, but more importantly, the challenges facing policy and development planners and decision-makers in the various governments and administrations in PICTs. We already know for instance that even with the current population of those in the 15 – 24 age bracket that:
 - There are not enough jobs and employment opportunities that can accommodate those that leave schools to enter the employment market every year⁶;
 - A vast proportion of this age group had dropped out at primary school level and never made it to secondary schools, with as high as a 70 per cent dropout rate in some countries⁷;
 - A large proportion of this age group never even made it to primary schools (mostly in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea)⁸;
 - Even those that go through some form of basic education are not taught life-skills and livelihood skills that will help become productive members of the economic machinery of their countries as Lifeskills curriculum are not taught at primary education in many PICTs;

⁵ Current Pacific population dynamics and recent trends - (Dr Gerald Haberkorn, SPC Demography/Population programme, July 2004)

⁶ Guardianship of Pacific Island Resources – Land, Sea and People – 1999 Theme paper for CRGA

⁷ Forum Basic Education Action Plan

⁸ The Pacific Island Challenge – Human Resources Development – 2001 Conference Theme

- There is increasing incidence of social ills as evidenced by increasing levels of:
 - i) Poor self esteem and increased unsocial behaviours,
 - ii) Sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancies, septic abortions,
 - iii) Behavioural and mental health problems and family break-ups,
 - iv) Alcohol consumption, smoking and involvement with hard drugs,
 - v) Criminal activities ranging from petty crimes to serious cases.
 - They are facing a period of ‘cultural transition’ which at times creates a clash between the traditional and ‘new’ cultures invading our shores,
7. On the supply side we also already know that governments and administrations just do not have the resources to meet all the needs of the growing numbers of young people in the respective countries and territories. Many countries and territories especially in Polynesia, Micronesia and part of Melanesia have achieved a ‘one hundred per cent’ primary education enrolment, and some have achieved a ‘100 per cent secondary education’ enrolment, which is highly commendable. Most countries and territories provide basic accessible health services to all their people. However, that is about where the list ends on areas that governments and administrations can influence directly.
8. Urbanisation is a big challenge in many PICTs. The perception that Pacific people are primarily rural dwellers is true for only three of our members, the predominantly rural societies of Papua New Guinea (87%), Solomon Islands (84%) and Vanuatu (79%) which dominate the Pacific demographic landscape and accounting for 74 per cent of the region’s overall population. However, 11 of the 22 Pacific Island countries and territories already have a larger proportion of their population living in urban rather than rural areas. Given annual urban growth rates of between 3 and 4 per cent, population doubling times range from 17 to 23 years in urban areas. To illustrate some concrete implications of this development, it is worth considering the challenge facing Kiribati in relation to population developments on South Tarawa in particular. Should South Tarawa’s population continue to expand at its current estimated growth rate of 5.2 per cent per annum, it will double in just 13 years, reaching a population of 73,400 people by 2013. Already experiencing enormous population-resource pressures at present, it will be a huge challenge for South Tarawa’s economy, society and environment to cope with an additional 36,700 people in nine years.⁹ The challenges in particular for young people will increase exponentially.
9. The fact is none of the various challenges mentioned above are new. We know they exist and are unlikely to disappear. On the contrary, they are likely to increase further. The primary question must therefore be – what can be done to turn this huge untapped resource in each of our countries and territories – our young people, into a productive force that can both drive and generate our economies? How can our Youth of today be empowered to secure and sustain the future of our countries and territories? How can they be involved in helping set the agenda for future development? What do leaders and decision makers need to do to harness the untapped potential of our youth, and accept them as real partners in our nation-building responsibilities? These are difficult questions to answer, and the next few paragraphs represent our initial attempt to pull together a few ideas to help focus and guide the discussions on the theme.

⁹ Current Pacific population dynamics and recent trends - (Dr Gerald Haberkorn, SPC Demography/Population programme, July 2004)

POSSIBLE AREAS FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

10. **Relevant and Appropriate Education** – The second Millennium Development Goal (MDG 2) deals with universal access to education. Many PICTs have made reasonable progress in this MDG. However from a broader regional perspective, apart from striving to achieve a ‘one hundred per cent primary and secondary school enrolment’ in PICTs where this has still not been achieved, governments and administrations must *devote much greater time, effort and resources in skills education, through technical and vocational education and non-formal education*. Current education policies in many PICTs are not responding to the skills required in the job market. Most of the employment opportunities in many PICTs are in the trade and general skills areas, where much of the university graduates would not be able to make effective contributions. A good example of this is found in an assessment of remittances – which for countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, Fiji, and Vanuatu are primarily from people being employed in jobs that require technical and vocational skills, yet national education policy analysts are still putting the bulk of resources into formal education. For countries such as PNG and Solomon Islands where a significant proportion of children do not even make it to classrooms, and for countries where up to 70 per cent of children drop out of primary school, it is very clear that this substantial proportion of the population needs programmes that would sharpen their skills in order for them to contribute effectively to economic development. The role of governments and administrations should be to create conducive environments for learning, and facilitate development of vocational and skills-based training programmes at national level, establish accreditation systems so that skills are recognised, and create an enabling environment in the employment sector including establishment of support infrastructure that would attract people with skills to participate meaningfully in the markets, rather than directly involved in conducting the trainings or providing the jobs. In relation to skills, apart from technical skills in specialised areas, a generic set of life-skills and livelihood skills not provided at formal training institutions need to be included and delivered including leadership, planning, people management, advocacy, counselling, writing, project development, project management, project implementation and monitoring, reporting skills, survival skills, parenting skills and negotiation skills to name a few.
11. **Good Health and Healthy Living** – Good health is an outcome which is determined by many factors, some of which are covered under Millennium Development Goals 1, 4, 5 and 6, and to some extent MDG 2, 3, 7 and 8. Governments and Administrations supported at times by development partners have invested millions of dollars (or equivalent) in health programmes for young people over the years trying to reduce or reverse the tide of sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancies, abortions, psychiatric conditions, alcohol consumption, smoking, drug abuse etc, but have not made too much headway. Also increasing are newer health-related issues such as sexual violence and gender-based violence and again we are struggling for success stories. Again, we need to see if and where we are going wrong. Are there other ways of working to address these challenges? Can we learn from young people where our strategies are failing? Should they be allowed to become part of our search for solutions? How can we tap this potential? There have been some success stories such as the ‘Youth to youth’ initiatives. Should such initiatives be more broadly supported and adopted at national level? Should making young people responsible for managing their own health be part of the solution? Much of the health care systems in the Pacific today are still very much modelled in the ‘we will look after your health for you’ approach. The challenge for governments and administrations may indeed be, to re-evaluate how we are doing business, to ensure our youth are part of the planning for the solutions as well as part of the implementation of interventions that address their health concerns.

12. **Employment Creation / Opportunity Creation / Creation of Conducive Environment for Employment of young people** – It is very difficult for the governments / administrations / private sectors of our PICTs even collectively to absorb into ‘paid employment’ and other economic generating activities the numbers of young people coming out to join the labour force every year. For countries such as Solomon Islands and Fiji, it could be as high as 10,000 – 15,000 people every year against a scenario of between 500 – 1500 employment opportunities. For Papua New Guinea it can be higher than 150,000 per annum. Governments and administrations need to re-assess their approach to addressing youth employment. The focus should not be in direct provision of jobs, but in:

- Investing in appropriate education and training facilities to appropriately develop the skills of young people (across a broad area of competencies – see para 10) to enable them to engage in economic activities. This is NOT formal education which is already well looked after, but in vocational, technical and skills training and development institutions;
- Establishment of infrastructure networks and support systems including market outlets for products. More efficient rural to urban transport systems to facilitate faster movements of products from producers in rural areas to markets in urban areas, or the export markets;
- Provide incentives and support for young entrepreneurs to engage in business establishments and employment creation, including bank loan schemes, business small-grant schemes, tax breaks, and consider establishment of small ‘technical advisory and support units’ to guide young people wishing to engage in entrepreneurship activities;
- Supporting the establishment of youth volunteer schemes which provide training for young people and engage them to serve in community service through-out their own countries/territories or even regionally – with length of volunteer service linked for assistance to, a loan or grant facility that allows volunteers individually or collectively should they wish to embark on small business development;
- Encouraging the broader involvement of young people of both gender through instruments such as what used to be the ‘boys brigade and girl guides’ - but with a clearer acknowledgement that they are involved in nation-building, and contribution to socio-economic development of their countries and territories;
- Supporting the establishment and running of ‘youth-to-youth’ initiatives that are run and managed by youths (with access to technical advice and support from technical advisory support units as required) but enabling young people to own, plan, manage, and run their own programmes and be able to do something for themselves and their friends,
- Supporting the establishment of recruitment agencies for young people that will be in regular contact with industry and potential employment sectors and train young people to manage such agencies;

- Establishing rural training centres to provide training in skills that are important in rural (and even urban) areas such as *farming & the, use of fertilisers and integrated pest management (IPM) technologies; fishery – especially in post-harvest handling, preservation and marketing; forest management, timber processing, grading and certification; land-use management and water-shed management; building and carpentry; mechanics for small engines such as outboard motors, generators, and chainsaws; electrical wiring and solar water installation and management; water supply management and plumbing; drafting, tailoring and sewing; basic accounting and book keeping; basic skills in reporting and developing funding proposals; community management, basic workforce management etc* and train young people to become apprentices and ultimately trainers in such institutions,
- Promote concept of ‘Youth Environment Ambassadors’ programmes involving the establishment of national youth environment advocates and ambassadors who can be trained by organisations such as SPREP, SPC, SOPAC in association with national environment ministries / departments to be involved with ‘keeping the environment clean’ programmes at national level supported by governments and administrations,
- Establishing gender-based policies in all sectors of work and training and develop support guidelines to help implementation at all levels. Promote opportunities for young women to engage in economic development and have equal opportunities to realise their social, economic, cultural and political aspirations. Enact legislation and policy to reduce and eradicate gender-based violence. This is the focus of MDG 3.
- Promulgating legislative reforms that offer alternatives to prison for young offenders that among other things focus on counselling and skills training to enable reintegration to communities,
- Encouraging development of ‘Youth culture programmes’ that focus on understanding of culture, cultural preservation and cultural expression. Involving young people in the preservation of traditional values, norms and practices is essential to developing their cultural identities. However, such programmes can also help young people deal with the interface between traditional and modern culture and manage the cultural transition in a more balanced way,
- Involving and engaging young people in media and ITC. This is possibly an area of biggest potential for young people to develop. Provision of opportunities in this area for instance to develop talents and preserve cultural expressions through media productions.

13. **Achieve more for Pacific Youth through strengthening of strategic partnerships, alliances and coalition building** – The harvest is large but the workers are few – is the slogan sometimes used when the issue of youth comes up for discussions. This statement however epitomises the way in which good intentioned stakeholders including SPC, who are committed to assist the development of the young people in the Pacific, carve up the ‘regional youth cake’ and try to make an impact with whatever financial resources and expertise they have at their disposal in a unilateral way. Yet with all the good intentions, no single organisation or government can meet the challenge posed by the burgeoning youth population in many PICTs. We recall the sentiments expressed by the SPC Conference during the 50th Anniversary Conference in Canberra in 1997 in relation to the meagre resources SPC had invested into the Youth programme at that time when it said ‘... *We hope that the Pacific Youth are at least as important than Tuna*¹⁰...’ The budget for the SPC youth programme is still meagre – however the challenge has increased dramatically. The answer lies not only in increasing the SPC budget for the youth programme – which we have been trying very hard to do with minimal success, *but more importantly in creating effective strategic partnerships with other stakeholders committed to help Pacific youth move forward. This will involve ‘a new way of working’ between partners, pooling of resources will be the way to go, and flying our individual flags will have to be replaced by flying the ‘flag of partnership for Pacific youth’. Effectively addressing the youth challenges for the Pacific demands a new approach – at national, regional and international level.* This is also the type of approach called for by Pacific Leaders in the Pacific Plan¹¹. We could be the region that came up with the model on how to do it better. We have an opportunity to turn the tide. *Think how much more could be achieved if all stakeholders, international and regional agencies, bilateral and multilateral partners and governments and administrations were to pool their resources – this has to be the way forward.* We will witness one such partnership at this conference with the introduction of the publication ‘The State of Pacific Youth’ by UNICEF in partnership with SPC.

UNICEF has done significant work with young people in the region, a role they are committed to continue for years to come. The SPC is privileged to have UNICEF as a partner in working with Pacific youth and may the partnership together with all other partners and stakeholders in helping Pacific youth bring benefits to the young people of the Pacific for generations to come.

14. This is what the theme for this the 4th Conference of the Pacific Community is all about - **‘Youth Empowerment for a secure, prosperous and sustainable future’**. But as a region, we have to move quickly and decisively, for it is the future of our people that is at stake. There are many things that can undermine the livelihood of our people and the future of our countries and territories. HIV/AIDS is one of them, the Avian Influenza another. See how we have rallied together with our partners to tackle these diseases in order that our youth of today, our young people of the Pacific are protected. This is commendable, but protecting them from diseases and not being able to help them take their place in collective nation-building is a far bigger challenge. As a region we can no longer sit back and let the youth scenario go into a spiral that could potentially undermine the economic stability and national security of our region. We already know what the consequences of inaction will be. It is no longer just a question of resources or politics, but of the correct decisions that need to be made now to safeguard the future survival of our people and our countries and territories. On current trends, the future can be very bleak for many of our members, but choices we make today can alter our stars, and enable countries to chart a new course, of course with new challenges.

¹⁰ 50th SPC Anniversary Conference – Canberra, 1997

¹¹ Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration

15. The Secretariat looks for guidance from the Conference on specific programmes and interventions at national and regional levels that could be implemented or pursued further.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

16. The outcome from the Ministerial discussions and decisions on the theme will be embodied in the 'Koror Statement on Youth Empowerment for a Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Future'. The statement will reflect the priority youth issues prevailing in the region, and outline the agreed decisions and actions for implementation at national and regional levels.
17. The statement will be presented to the 2nd Conference of Youth Ministers of the Pacific Community to be held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea from 5-7 December 2005. The Youth Ministers will consider the development and adoption of the Pacific Youth Strategy 2010 as the new regional framework for youth development in the region to the year 2010 and beyond. Priorities agreed to by Conference for implementation will be incorporated into the Pacific Youth Strategy 2010.

28 October 2005