

## PREPARATION FOR PANEL DISCUSSION AT THE CRGA

November 2024

Pape'ete, French Polynesia.

### Discussion questions for the session

**What innovative approaches can be implemented to effectively engage youth in leadership and decision-making roles, especially in the priority areas they have identified, to ensure they have an active voice in shaping their communities' futures?**

#### Salutations.....

As we gather today, we confront a critical reality that affects the very fabric of our societies and the future of our region, and that demands our immediate attention and collective action. Recent statistics reveal that a staggering 60% of the Pacific population is under the age of 30 years, a demographic that embodies both potential and promise. However, it is with great urgency that I highlight a troubling reality: a significant proportion of this youth population remains unemployed.

This situation presents us with a dual challenge: on one hand, we have a vibrant and dynamic youth demographic eager to contribute to our communities, economies, and cultures. On the other, we face the harsh reality of unemployment, which not only stifles individual aspirations but also threatens the stability and growth of our nations.

As leaders, we must recognize that this is not just an economic issue; it is a matter of social justice and equity. Our young people are our future, and we cannot afford to let their potential go untapped.

It is imperative that we take deliberate steps to empower our young people, ensuring they have an active voice in shaping their futures.

With the recent convening of the Pacific Youth Minister Meeting (PMYM), these seven (7) priority areas were endorsed:

- i. Education, employment, training and economic pathways.
- ii. Health and Wellbeing
- iii. Climate change, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity
- iv. Pacific identities and heritage
- v. Human Rights, peace and security

- vi. Integrated connectivity, information and privacy
- vii. Leadership and Governance

For the purpose of time, I would like to share three innovative approaches that could be implemented to effectively engage youth in leadership and decision-making roles

### **Innovative Approaches**

#### **1. A development framework with an accountability and governance mechanism that has the buy in of National Youth Machineries, the Pacific Youth voices representatives at the regional and local level and development partners and agencies.**

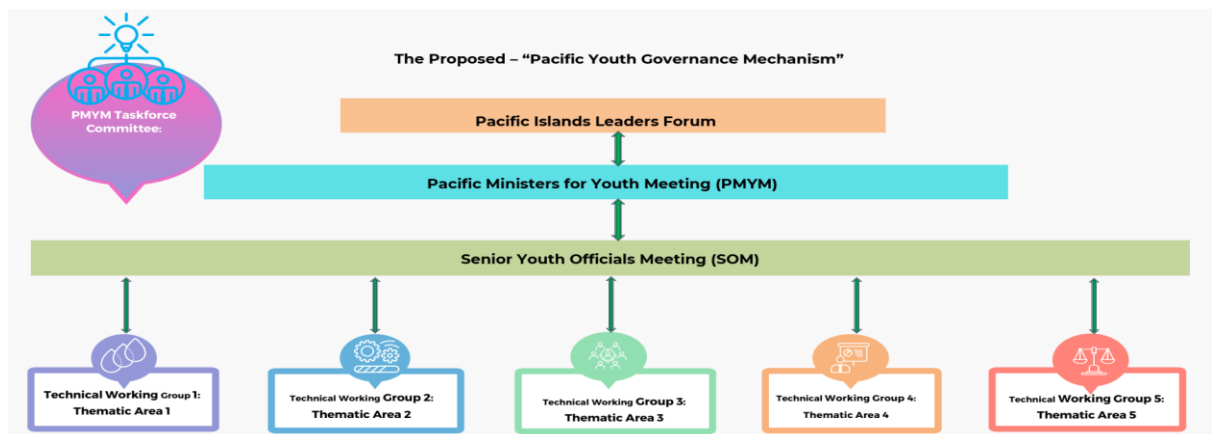
The former Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014- 2023 was endorsed by Pacific Ministers for Youth in 2013 and there was never any follow up meeting after or tracking of progress on commitments made in that framework.

Under SPC's leadership, a new governance mechanism was endorsed by the Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting (PMYM) held in Nadi in September this year.

This governance mechanism accountable to youths of the Pacific entails the following:

- A Pacific Youth Development Framework 2025- 2034 with the 7 thematic areas I listed earlier. This PYDF will have an implementation plan, a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, a communications strategy, a resource mobilisation plan and some seed funding committed.
- That the 7 thematic areas have thematic working groups (TWGs) led by governments, national youth bodies, technical agencies. These TWGs inform the thematic work and track progress for reporting to the Senior Officials Meeting.
- The Senior Officials meet annually (virtually) and in the year of the Ministerial, they have to meet prior to the ministers meeting.
- The Ministers for Youth meet bi-ennially (every 2 years), face to face.

## 2. Youths at tables of decision making and policy making



Using the mantra, 'nothing about us, without us', one approach is: **to ensure that youths are at the policy making and decision-making table as equals.**

This is the innovative approach that the Pacific Ministers for Youth endorsed as their meeting governance when they met in Nadi, Fiji in September.

At the Senior Officials for Youth Meeting and the Ministers for Youth Meeting where the PS for Youth and Sports, Fiji and Hon. Minister for Youth and Sports respectively chaired:

- the chairperson of the Pacific Youth Council sat next to them as co-chair. The sessions were divided up at the start of the day where each led;
- at the members table, behind the national flag, sat the head of the government delegation and next to the head of delegation, sat the National Youth Council representative and the NYC representative was given equal speaking rights.

This approach provided the opportunity for upcoming youth leaders to learn how to engage with senior government officials at a formal meeting; how to conduct themselves in a regional meeting especially, how to put their issues across in a manner that generates discussions and them, learning how to be part of that discussion.

The secretariat had been sending official communications and held several virtual meetings since the beginning of the year, preparing officials and youth councils for this type of meeting governance so, there were no surprises when we got to the meetings.

As a government official and, a young Fijian, I found this approach empowering as it was intentional and methodical in preparation.

## 3. Regional architecture alignment

In developing the priorities and discussing with the youth councils and with national youth machineries, the priorities were aligned with the 2050 Strategy priorities.



The PMYM was cognizant of the Regional Architecture Review and as it was taking place in the week after the 53<sup>rd</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting.

Ms. Virginia Dawson, of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat shared with us the 53<sup>rd</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Communique. Annex A recommendation 9 requires the alignment of any new ministerial with the 2050 strategy and that the ministerial be endorsed by the leaders.

A major task that was then bestowed on SPC by the Pacific Youth Ministers Meeting is to work with the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat to map out the process to get the Leaders to endorse the youth regional governance mechanism at the 54<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Honiara in September 2025.

Our youth represent the future of the Pacific Islands, brimming with energy, creativity, and potential. However, without meaningful engagement and opportunities, we risk losing the invaluable contributions they can make to our communities. It is imperative that we take deliberate steps to empower our young people, ensuring they have an active voice in shaping their futures.

In conclusion, the time has come for us to recognize and harness the potential of our youth as leaders and change-makers. By actively engaging them in decision-making processes across these thematic areas, we can ensure that their voices are not only heard but also valued in shaping the future of our communities.

Let us commit to fostering an environment where our young people can

thrive, contribute, and lead. Together, we can build a Pacific that reflects the dreams and aspirations of all its inhabitants, especially our youth.