

**FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS**
(17–19 November 2020, Virtual Meeting)

Working Paper

**AGENDA ITEM No. 10: Update on outcomes of the High-Level Dialogue on Youth –
Pacific Youth Development Framework**

(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

Purpose

1. This paper presents an update on the mid-term review of the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF) 2014–2023 and information on progress made in advancing youth development outcomes through SPC's integrated programming. In light of COVID-19, the paper also highlights some of the specific impacts of the pandemic on youth, and associated responses at national and regional level.

Key points

2. The mid-term review of the PYDF was conducted in late 2019. However, its completion has been delayed by travel restrictions and other COVID-19 measures. Accordingly, the final review report will be presented to CRGA 51 and will, in addition, include assessment of COVID-19 impacts on youth in the region.
3. A range of current assessments indicate that the COVID-19 situation has exacerbated existing challenges for youth, including unemployment and social exclusion. Young people's access to education and employment opportunities has been disrupted, and the economic downturn is likely to put them on a much more difficult trajectory to finding and maintaining good quality jobs and income. However, these impacts have not yet resulted in many direct and specific interventions targeting youth.
4. SPC is focusing on monitoring COVID impacts on youth and working with partners to explore options to address these, including through strengthening integrated programming and mainstreaming support for youth in recovery efforts.

Recommendations

5. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. recognise the impacts of COVID-19 on youth and the associated responses at regional and national level;

- ii. note the update on the mid-term review of the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF) and progress in its implementation;
 - iii. reaffirm the calls by CRGA 48 and CRGA 49 for more resources for implementation of the PYDF, for all members to lead resourcing for youth development, and for the Secretariat to deliver regional interventions aligned with the PYDF;
 - iv. support the efforts being made to assist youth, and direct SPC to continue to strengthen integrated programming focused on youth across the organisation.
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Update on outcomes of the High-Level Dialogue on Youth: Pacific Youth Development Framework

Background

6. The High-Level Dialogue on Youth at the Ninth Conference of the Pacific Community in 2015 recognised the need for a high-level forum to monitor the situation of youth, drive progress and ensure commitment to relevant issues. The Conference agreed that the focus on youth would become a standing agenda item at SPC governing body meetings. The Secretariat's Social Development Programme was tasked with monitoring progress on youth development and formulating appropriate ways to support youth issues and the PYDF. This paper provides updates on the specific impacts of COVID-19 on youth; the mid-term review of the PYDF; and the efforts of the Secretariat to advance youth development outcomes through integrated programming.

Youth and COVID-19

7. The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting every aspect of people's lives in an unprecedented manner. For young people, it has exacerbated existing difficulties including unemployment and social exclusion. There is evidence that the pandemic has hit vulnerable groups disproportionately. Intersecting aspects of identity, such as sex, gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic disadvantage, increase the vulnerability of young people, particularly those who are not in education or employment.¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) considers that young people are less at risk of developing severe cases of COVID-19 than older people. However, disruption of their access to education and employment opportunities as a result of the economic downturn is likely to put the young generation on a much more volatile trajectory to finding and maintaining good quality jobs and income.²
8. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Asia and the Pacific on the impacts of COVID-19 on youth noted that the pandemic presented severe challenges for young people's employment prospects in these regions. Even before the pandemic, young people were facing challenges in the labour market.³ In the Pacific, the average youth unemployment rate pre-COVID-19 was already much higher at 23% than the global average of 12–13%.⁴ According to the ILO study, in Fiji, 75.6% of youth jobs were lost across the sectors that were reviewed, i.e. agriculture; retail; hotels and restaurants; inland transport and other services; construction; and textiles and textile products⁵. Similar effects have been observed globally leading to severe economic and labour market shocks⁶.
9. These impacts of COVID-19 have not translated to direct and specific interventions targeting youth in the government stimulus packages that have been launched. For example, in Fiji, despite the very high loss of employment for youth across the seven sectors under review, the stimulus package provided support for the general population including young people, but no targeted interventions or support were identified for youth.⁷ Other stimulus packages were similar in this regard.

¹ OECD, 2020, Youth and COVID-19, Response, Recovery and Resilience. Page 5. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134356-ud5kox3g26&title=Youth-and-COVID-19-Response-Recovery-and-Resilience

² WHO. 2020. Cited in OECD. 2020. Youth and COVID-19, Response, Recovery and Resilience. Page 5.

³ ILO and ADB. 2020. Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis in Asia and the Pacific. Page vi. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_753369.pdf

⁴ SPC. 2015. Pacific Youth Development Framework. <https://www.spc.int/resource-centre/pacific-youth-development-framework>

⁵ ILO and ADB. 2020. Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis in Asia and the Pacific. Page vi. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_753369.pdf

⁶ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020, *Special Issue on COVID-19 and Youth*, Programme on Youth Unit, UN.

⁷ Government of Fiji. 2020. Stimulus package for COVID-19.

10. At regional level, SPC has taken action in the last few months to address the impacts of COVID-19 on youth. An internal paper, 'Pacific youth and COVID-19 brief', was developed to inform initiatives responding to these impacts. The brief provided recommendations for immediate actions and policy interventions that could be developed now, in addition to longer-term policy interventions. Some of the recommendations were explored as part of SPC's response, Youth and COVID-19, which focuses on three initiatives.
11. The first initiative combines two components of the Youth@Work model, namely Youth Social Enterprise (Youth-SENT) and Youth Volunteers in the Pacific (Youth ViP). The second focuses on capacity development, and the third on intergenerational dialogue and learning.
12. Discussions on the first two regional initiatives have taken place with partners, including the Commonwealth Secretariat's Youth Programme and the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), New Zealand, to pilot support for youth who have been impacted by COVID-19, in line with the outcome areas of the PYDF. The initiatives will be implemented with financial support from the Commonwealth Secretariat and SPC, and technical assistance from Wintec to develop training that could further progress to micro-qualifications for participants.
13. For the third initiative on intergenerational dialogue and learning, a webinar was convened as part of International Youth Day (12 August). It was welcomed by young people who engaged from across the Pacific. There will be further webinars on various topics to not only support youth in their recovery efforts, but also to help them address broader development challenges, particularly in terms of applying indigenous knowledge and practices shared through intergenerational dialogue.

Mid-term review of PYDF – initial findings

14. As endorsed by CRGA last year, a mid-term review of PYDF was carried out by an external consultant during the last quarter of 2019. Several factors including travel restrictions and border closures have delayed the finalisation of the report and it is therefore not ready for presentation to CRGA this year. However, the additional time required to finalise the review report will allow for inclusion of information on COVID-19 impacts on young Pacific people and the progress of response and recovery efforts.

Objectives

15. The purpose of the mid-term review was to take stock of progress made in Pacific countries and territories (PICTs) since 2015, in line with the intended outcomes of the PYDF. The review had four objectives:
 - i. Conduct a stocktake of PYDF implementation since its launch in 2015
 - ii. Map programmes and services for youth against the four outcome areas
 - iii. Analyse gaps and challenges in implementing youth development initiatives against PYDF outcomes
 - iv. Document good practices and lessons learned during three years of implementation

Methodology

16. The review adopted a 'summative evaluation' methodology, which comprised four broad questions:
- i. What are the specific policies and strategies developed by the country based on the PYDF that have been implemented since 2015?
 - ii. What is the progress so far with respect to the four priority outcomes?
 - iii. What are the gaps between the policies and strategies implemented and the four priority outcomes?
 - iv. How do we address these gaps for further improvement?
17. Based on this methodology, six PICTs (Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga) were selected from across the subregions for in-depth review, while information on other PICTs was collected using a questionnaire-based survey and interviews.

Summary of preliminary findings

Outcome area 1: More young people have secured decent employment

18. The initial review findings highlighted that the countries targeted all had initiatives in place to promote decent employment for youth. Initiatives that were common across the countries included supporting youth access to formal education and vocational training; scholarship and loan schemes for tertiary education and vocational training; capacity building on entrepreneurship and financial support; and availability of employment services catering for youth. At regional level, the efforts of development partners, including the United Nations Development Programme, ILO and Oxfam, were also noted as promoting entrepreneurship with young people.

Outcome area 2: Young people's health and well-being status are improved

19. The review noted that the health services available included mental health services; sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services; and health promotion services, e.g. on nutrition and physical activity. These services were available across the countries targeted. Youth-specific SRH services were available in Kiribati and Samoa, while in others, services for the general population could also be accessed by youth.

Outcome area 3: Governance structures empower young people to increase their influence in decision-making processes

20. The review examined governance structures for youth, including National Youth Councils, ministries or departments with responsibility for youth, and engagement of youth in sharing responsibility with governments on relevant development initiatives. The role of National Youth Councils in providing a voice for youth to influence decision-making varied. Councils in Kiribati, FSM and Tonga were active, while others were less active given their resourcing challenges. At the government level, resourcing for ministries and departments for youth varied from one financial year to the next. Clearly, budget allocations for youth ministries/departments are a challenge and they are often one of the least well-resourced sectors.

Outcome area 4: Environmental action is increasingly led and influenced by young people

21. The engagement of youth in environmental action was evident in the review findings. While challenges were identified in the sustainability of some of the initiatives reported, anecdotal evidence showed that youth were increasingly engaged in environmental issues, particularly those related to climate change and resilience.

Next steps

22. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the validation workshop with PICTs on the draft report and findings was cancelled. As a result of this situation, more work is being planned to ensure the report incorporates an assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on youth and is validated by members before it is finalised. The final update to CRGA in 2021 will comprise presentation of the full report and recommendations for consideration.

Integrated programming and policy work

23. Mainstreaming of youth issues across SPC programmes has become part of ongoing work where funding permits. In addition to the work outlined below, the Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division and Land Resources Division have implemented initiatives, but these are outside this reporting period.

Youth and non-communicable disease (NCD)

24. As part of SPC's response to the region's NCD crisis, the Public Health Division (PHD) has mobilised and engaged youth leadership in Wake up! The project was launched in 2017 to educate youth about NCDs and train them in communication techniques to raise NCD awareness in their communities. Youth groups were given support and training to produce videos and create murals (graffiti art) and, in 2019, youth representatives from eight PICTs (Cook Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna) developed comic strips under the guidance of professional artists.
25. Through the Wake Up! project, PHD has launched a Pacific Youth NCD Ambassador programme to support innovations by young people to raise awareness on NCD prevention and control, not only for their peers but also for all members of their communities.

Youth and agriculture

26. To support the engagement of youth in agriculture, the Youth and Agriculture Policy Brief has been updated to identify gaps in relevant policy and programming. The brief will help inform advocacy of policy and programme interventions targeting youth engagement in agriculture, including efforts responding to the impacts of COVID-19.

National-level support

27. At national level, support has been provided for Cook Islands and FSM on the review and development of their National Youth Policy. This support, which is provided on an as-needs basis, includes capacity building for focal points so they can continue this work themselves.

Conclusion

28. In 2020, PYDF implementation has focused on integrated programming by the Secretariat, and the preliminary findings of the mid-term review. COVID-19 has specific impacts on youth, as highlighted in the ILO/ADB report. While there have been national and regional responses to these impacts, there are gaps for youth. The impacts of COVID-19 on young people will be further explored and validated as part of the remaining work to be undertaken for the mid-term review, with the aim of providing an updated perspective, and guidance for future PYDF implementation in light of the impacts of the pandemic.

Recommendations

29. CRGA is invited to:
- i. recognise the impacts of COVID-19 on youth and the associated responses at regional and national level;
 - ii. note the update on the mid-term review of the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF) and progress in its implementation;
 - iii. reaffirm the calls by CRGA 48 and CRGA 49 for more resources for implementation of the PYDF, for all members to lead resourcing for youth development, and for the Secretariat to deliver regional interventions aligned with the PYDF;
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