



**NINTH CONFERENCE OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY**  
(Alofi, Niue, 3–5 November 2015)

**AGENDA ITEM 7: HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: GROWING A RESILIENT PACIFIC COMMUNITY THROUGH  
YOUTH-FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT**

---

(Brief provided by the secretariat)

*‘Young people can only make their communities more productive and resilient if they have the opportunity to become better educated and healthier, express their voices and engage in useful work.’<sup>1</sup> The problems facing young people in the Pacific continue to be aggravated by existing hardships and poverty, stagnating economies that stifle the creation of employment opportunities, continuing high population growth and rapid urban expansion. Without major investment in young people, this generation will struggle, and we will collectively have difficulty in meeting the development challenges facing the Pacific, including climate change and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Failing to invest sufficiently in youth will also trigger substantial economic, social and political costs, resulting from early school drop-out, poor labour market entry, risky sexual behaviour, substance abuse, crime and violence.’<sup>2</sup>*

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The High-Level Dialogue presents a combination of global, regional and national perspectives on youth-centred development. It will explore global and regional policy responses and best practices at the national level, in formulating recommendations to increase investment in youth.
2. Building resilient communities requires a change of practice to refocus investments across sectors towards youth, and to engage and target vulnerable youth. This paper summarises the situation of Pacific youth and identifies concrete actions to strengthen national- and regional-level interventions to promote youth-centred development.

**SUMMARY**

***The situation of Pacific youth***

3. The population of the Pacific region is around 10 million people, more than half of whom are under the age of 25. The population is growing rapidly, placing huge demographic pressures on basic resources and core services such as education, health and justice. Despite the substantial size of the youth population in the region, and the significance of issues for youth, there remains a lack of targeted investment that is required to meet the needs of all young people in the Pacific. Key youth populations marginalised from mainstream development efforts include young people who are not in education, employment and training, young women, rural youth, young people with disabilities, and youth who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF and SPC (2011) *The State of Pacific Youth Report 2011: Opportunities and Obstacles*.

<sup>2</sup> <http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>

4. The impact of this lack of investment has been minimal change in the overall status of youth.<sup>3</sup> For example, in education, few young people access tertiary education because of the low rates of post-high school completions. Although very little up-to-date data is available, Palau recorded the highest tertiary participation rate (61.8%) in 2014, Marshall Islands recorded 42.8% in 2012 and Fiji experienced significantly lower rates, at 16.1%, recorded in 2005. Tonga and Vanuatu experience even lower tertiary participation rates, of 6.3% and 4.7%, in 2003 and 2004 respectively.<sup>4</sup> Average youth unemployment rates in the Pacific are 23%,<sup>5</sup> compared to a global average of 12.6%.<sup>6</sup> The number of job seekers far outweighs the number of job opportunities. For example, in Fiji, there were 4.3 people of working age for every formal sector job in 2000.<sup>7</sup> Fifty-eight per cent of young men aged 20–24 years in Kiribati are not engaged in productive activities, while the figure in Marshall Islands is 44%, and in Samoa, 46%.<sup>8</sup> Current research shows that when large youth populations are combined with factors such as high youth unemployment, economic hardship and political instability, conflict is far more likely to break out, and it is often perpetrated by male youth (15–34 years).<sup>9</sup> With little systematic engagement of youth, and a marginalisation of key youth populations, youth disenfranchisement can lead to many negative consequences.<sup>10</sup> These conditions exist in varying degrees throughout the region.
5. In terms of health, the adolescent birth rate is highest in Nauru (94.3 births per 1000), followed by Marshall Islands (85 births per 1000) and Vanuatu (81 births per 1000). The rate is lowest in Niue (19.9 births per 1000).<sup>11</sup> Papua New Guinea (PNG) experiences the highest rate of HIV infection in the region, accounting for 98 per cent of the 5,169 new HIV diagnoses reported in Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) in 2008, and these new diagnoses are more prevalent among females than males. Where data is available, depression-related suicide is noted as the main cause of youth mortality in the Pacific; a more prevalent cause of youth mortality than drowning and other accidents. Seventy-five per cent of all deaths annually in the Pacific are due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which disproportionately affect women. The Pacific is experiencing increasing prevalence of type 2 (or adult-onset) diabetes in children (up to seven years), as well as obesity in young people. Global Youth Tobacco Surveys (1999–2005) found that 7.8% of girls from countries in the western Pacific region were current users of tobacco in any form, compared with 15% of boys.<sup>12</sup> Smoking and alcohol consumption is often higher for youth populations in the Pacific than for older age groups. Alcohol abuse is recognised as causing or contributing to violence (particularly gender-based violence), accidents (which are a major cause of youth fatality), unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
6. All PICTs have national youth policies, although the degree of implementation of these policies varies across the region, while several of them are out of date. Securing resources for implementation is a major challenge, from both national and external sources. In addition, while youth ministries and departments take responsibility for developing youth policies, youth is a cross-cutting issue, and requires committed implementation from several ministries and departments. Few youth ministries have the level of influence within governments to ensure this cross-cutting implementation occurs effectively.

<sup>3</sup> SPC and UNICEF (2011) *The State of Pacific Youth Report 2011: Opportunities and Obstacles*.

<sup>4</sup> [http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT\\_DS](http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.spc.int/nmdi/youth>

<sup>6</sup> ILO (2013) *Global employment trends for youth 2013. A generation at risk*. International Labour Office, Geneva.

<sup>7</sup> McMurray, C. (2001) *Youth Employment in the Pacific*. Working paper for discussion, prepared for ILO/Japan Tripartite Regional Meeting on Youth Employment in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>8</sup> SPC (2015) *Op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Noble, C. & N. Pereira (2011) *Urban Youth in the Pacific: Increasing resilience and reducing risk for involvement in crime and violence*. UNDP Pacific Centre. Study prepared for the Forum Regional Security Council.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.spc.int/nmdi/maternal\\_health](http://www.spc.int/nmdi/maternal_health)

<sup>12</sup> WHO (2015) *Fact sheet on adolescent health*.

[http://www.wpro.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/docs/fs\\_201202\\_adolescent\\_health/en/](http://www.wpro.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/docs/fs_201202_adolescent_health/en/)

### ***National responses***

7. Over time, government focal points for youth, civil society and private sector organisations have made efforts to try to engage youth in various areas of development, some of which have been described as best practices across the region. Some PICTs are using bold and innovative strategies to partner with youth and to integrate with other development sectors, including the private sector, to maximise opportunities for youth, create employment opportunities and improve health and well-being. Some examples of these practices are described below, to indicate the potential of youth-centred approaches:

- **Youth to Youth in Health (YTYIH), Marshall Islands:** YTYIH was founded as an initiative of the Family Planning and Adolescent Reproductive Health Division of the Ministry of Health. Its aim is to empower young people to proactively participate in the development of their communities and the nation, through a focus on the prevention of health and social problems affecting Marshallese youth. YTYIH is now an established NGO working in partnership with the Ministry of Health. YTYIH operates a Youth Community Centre that provides training, a free clinic, and outreach health services for schools and communities throughout the atolls. Since 2011 the adolescent birth rate has fallen from 138 to 85 births per 1000.
- **Youth@Work, Solomon Islands:** This initiative, established by the Pacific Community (SPC), responds to the large number of unemployed youth in Solomon Islands, particularly in Honiara. Youth@Work provides pre-employment training, community work placements, internship opportunities, and start-up support for young people to manage a stall at a youth market. Youth@Work also provides opportunities for youth with disabilities. The programme has also successfully integrated youth employment opportunities in SPC's work on climate change and NCDs. Almost half of the Youth@Work participants have secured employment upon graduating from the programme.
- **Supporting youth enterprise through government and private sector partnership, Samoa:** In 2013 Samoa's Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development launched the Samoa Youth Enterprise Awards, in partnership with Digicel Samoa. This initiative reinvented the National Youth Awards Programme that was started in 2002, providing a forum through which young people could be inspired by their peers to innovate and take advantage of their creativity to make a living, support their families and communities, and contribute to the national economy. The recent developments have been made possible through new partnerships, combining efforts and resources to meet common objectives. Under both the initial scheme and the more recent Samoa Youth Enterprise Awards, young entrepreneurs are awarded grants to support the development of their enterprises, and through the partnership with Digicel, awardees and nominees are offered business mentoring. This year the Samoa Youth Enterprise Awards are expanding as an education initiative in schools.

### ***Areas for development***

8. Despite a variety of efforts across the Pacific that aim to improve the situation of youth, maintaining sustainable investment in youth-focused programmes remains a challenge. In the youth sector it is necessary to focus on the drivers for investment to inform decision-making for policy and programming. Some of these drivers are described below.

9. *Statistics and data:* A key driver for investment is the availability of accurate statistical and analytical evidence, and strategic information, to promote the significance of youth issues and increase commitment to policy implementation. These data are critically lacking for youth issues in the Pacific. Improved statistical data and analysis on youth is essential in identifying gaps and determining the scale of the response required to address them, in order to guide investment. Regional youth indicators need to be determined and aligned with international standards, and indicators are required for the calculation of the global Youth Development Index. These indicators need to be integrated into national surveillance tools and analyses.
10. *Integration and cross-sectoral coordination:* Growing a resilient generation of young people requires the contribution of various sectors. However, youth issues are often treated as standalone issues, unconnected to other development issues, and are often approached without addressing root causes. Since youth issues are both cross-cutting and multi-sectoral in nature, national youth policies need to be implemented across a range of ministries, which requires high-level commitment. Engaging sectors that are outside of government is also a significant factor in ensuring sustainable, integrated action. This includes involving communities and civil society organisations, as well as the private sector as the engine of growth.
11. *Youth as partners:* It is becoming increasingly evident that policies and programmes for young people are more effective and have greater impact when young people are actively involved in their development and implementation, when young people can influence the shape and nature of the initiatives, and when they have the opportunity to learn and develop important skills through the process of engagement. Engaging young citizens in this way can provide them with direct employment opportunities, and can also develop their skills and capacities for further opportunities. Strengthening representative structures and networks reaching marginalised youth, as well as development processes within governments and regional organisations in the Pacific, in ways that are more effective in engaging young people, will have significant positive impacts on development effectiveness across the Pacific.

### **Regional response**

#### *The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023*

12. The Pacific Community has been engaged in the coordination of regional efforts targeting youth. These efforts have evolved into what is now the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF), which seeks to manage a coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific. At its core are four priorities for youth development, which have been determined by young people and multiple stakeholders across various sectors. The PYDF aims to support PICTs to implement their own youth policies, by strengthening the environment for investment, including: monitoring and collecting youth data and statistics; facilitating youth-led advocacy to increase development accountability; and working collaboratively with regional development partners to more effectively target investments towards youth populations who are marginalised from mainstream development efforts. The framework will enhance coordination and help track progress of youth development activity in the region. Regional coordination of the PYDF is shared between SPC and the Pacific Youth Council, and recently a Pacific Regional Youth Think Tank was created to provide a pool of expertise to guide and advise work on the PYDF.

13. All of SPC's member countries and territories are encouraged to participate in the Pacific Youth Development Framework. By contributing information to national mapping, engaging in strategic dialogues, and sharing best practice, governments and administrations can receive and utilise consolidated information on the distribution of service delivery and development assistance to support resource mobilisation. The mapping will also provide evidence to increase the effectiveness of the delivery of targeted technical and development assistance, and to focus regional advocacy efforts. South-South exchanges will be promoted to support national youth policy implementation.

*Multi-sectoral programming in SPC*

14. Cross-sectoral coordination and integration of youth development is further supported by SPC's new 'Programming Approach', which features a programme management framework that engages expertise from all of SPC's programme areas. The approach facilitates systematic development of new projects and programmes that incorporate relevant economic development, natural resources management and social development outcomes. Integration work has already begun in climate change and non-communicable diseases. In relation to youth, opportunities for youth development, youth engagement and youth employment will be factored into programme design, and a focus on youth will become a relevant aspect of programming across SPC's programmes. The Programming Approach should contribute to delivering tangible benefits to SPC's member countries and territories, donors and staff. In particular, it is anticipated that this approach will result in facilitating access to funding for youth across development sectors within SPC.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

15. The Conference is invited to:
    - i. recognise the situation of youth in the region, as outlined in this paper;
    - ii. recognise the importance of the engagement of youth as partners in development;
    - iii. acknowledge the Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023 (PYDF) as the principal regional approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific;
    - iv. encourage development partners to participate in PYDF-related activities, to improve the effectiveness of investment in youth;
    - v. endorse the convening of an annual forum to monitor the regional situation of youth, and to track the progress of, and the level of investment in, youth-centred development at the regional level;
    - vi. commit to providing a set of opportunities to build young people's skills and to further inspire young people's innovation and creativity, including through, but not limited to, regional youth awards, youth internships within the Pacific Community's secretariat and through South-South cooperation;
    - vii. endorse the integration of youth issues across the Pacific Community's programme areas, particularly in the areas of climate change, food security and non-communicable diseases.
-