

Multi-sectoral ECD policies in the Pacific Region



VISION

The Pacific region is made up of many small island nations, each with their unique culture and challenges. But there is one thing they all have in common - a desire to improve the lives of their youngest citizens. To fulfil this desire, countries have been focused on the development of policies and programmes using a multi-sector coordination approach for addressing young children's holistic and integrated needs in a comprehensive manner.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

Towards its goals for young children, governments from eight Pacific Island countries – Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu – have been developing national, multi-sectoral ECD policies with costed action plans and multisectoral ECD monitoring and evaluation frameworks. They wanted to ensure that all children, from preconception to age six, would have access to quality ECD services, regardless of their location or socio-economic background.

These countries used a participatory and consultative approach to develop their multisectoral ECD policy instruments. They held consultation workshops at community, provincial/island, and central levels, as well as high-level interviews. They mapped services for young children across sectors of health, education, child protection, social protection, etc. For many countries, governments also conducted public expenditure analyses of ECD to determine current spending levels and spending efficiencies. With this comprehensive approach, countries were able to develop multi-sectoral ECD policy instruments that reflected the needs and priorities of each country. Further work is now required to translate these policies to meaningful improvements in service delivery for young children, and to continually ensure the multi-sectoral ECD policies are mutually supportive of sectoral plans in health, education, and others.

The countries have selected different lead agencies and models of coordination for policy planning and implementation that fit their governance structures, cultural and policy contexts. In Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, ECD policy development and implementation is being led by ministries of education and these ministries chair national ECD committees that include health, finance, justice, and social welfare ministries plus relevant civil society organisations. For the Federated States of Micronesia, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Working Group, that includes all ECD-relevant ministries, led policy development to ensure ECD will be well linked with their national SDG plan, meanwhile a Presidential National Advisory Committee for Children is currently being strengthened to be the custodian of the ECD policy. In Fiji, the health ministry leads a representative National ECD Technical Advisory Committee that pulls in other social sector ministries and finance ministry, along with civil society actors. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Cabinet convened a high-level committee across sectors of education, health, culture, and internal affairs, overseen by the Office of Chief Secretary and supported by a National ECD steering committee. Samoa is currently looking to re-activate its Committee on Convention on the Rights of the Child and will be using this unit to foster coordination on ECD.

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U N I C E F S U P P O R T

UNICEF has been supporting Pacific Island countries for improving the enabling environment, through strengthened strategic governance, coordination, management, and service delivery of ECD throughout the region. This has been facilitated by UNICEF's collaboration with governments and the support of global policy experts to enable Pacific governments to progressively realize the rights of their youngest citizens, in accordance with their national development strategies and in service of the global SDGs. UNICEF's approach to ECD prioritizes core sectoral investments and subsequently builds synergies across structures and sectors to multiply impacts. UNICEF programmes in child protection, education, health and nutrition, WASH, and social policy work with their ministerial counterparts on sectoral workplans that address deprivations in young children, meanwhile fostering cross-sectoral packages to optimize results for children.

O U T C O M E S

The Pacific region's journey is an inspiring story of what can be achieved through strong commitment and collaboration. The eight countries have demonstrated a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to ECD and have developed their policy tools in a consultative manner with a broad range of stakeholders, thereby driving local ownership of ECD and ensure these tools are relevant and fit-for-context. With the continued support of UNICEF and other partners, the countries will undoubtedly continue to make progress towards universalizing ECD services for all children in the region.