SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC)

High level Meeting on Cooperation for Child rights in the Asia-Pacific Region
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Brief overview of existing programmes and mechanisms for South-South cooperation among Pacific Island countries and territories – a regional perspective and partnership

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Brief

- The perspective of SPC on South-South Cooperation with relation to child rights
- The role of the SPC in progress made since 2010 (follow up of the Beijing Declaration)
- Specific areas within the three themes of the meeting (Adolescents, ECD and Urban settings) where SPC could contribute to future actions
- The identification of existing or future networks for knowledge exchange, peer learning and coordination to further cooperation for child rights in Asia and the Pacific.

The three themes are - Adolescents: current rights for future opportunities (Policies, Programmes and Laws to tackle adolescent issues), Fulfilling child rights with early childhood development and Urban settings as an opportunity for realizing all child rights

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Mr Chair
Our honoured hosts, the government of India and UNICEF
Honourable Ministers from participating governments in the Asia-Pacific Region
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I bring greetings from the Director General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Dr Jimmie Rodgers and the twenty-two Islands countries and territories in the Pacific region, many of whom are also represented at this High level Meeting on Cooperation for Child rights in the Asia-Pacific Region
2. Allow me first of all to convey my sincere appreciation to our hosts and co-conveners of this important meeting, the Government of India and UNICEF for inviting me and SPC to participate at this meeting.

3. Protecting and respecting the Rights of Children is an unquestionable duty of all parents, communities and governments. The three thematic issues discussed at this week’s meeting are critical issues for countries within our region to share experiences and forge new partnerships that will both protect and empower children and young people. We discussed the progress, experience, and challenges in the survival, protection and development of the nearly 1.2 billion children in the region. Themes for the HLM are; (i) Adolescents: current rights for future opportunities; (ii) Fulfilling child rights with early childhood development; and (iii) Urban settings as an opportunity for realizing all child rights.

4. In this brief presentation I will share some examples of existing programmes and mechanisms for South-South cooperation among the islands countries in the Pacific islands region including those mechanisms that might provide valuable platforms for south-south cooperation and how we might take the issues forward. I will also briefly share what SPC is doing that are relevant to the issues that are being addressed.

Big Ocean Islands

5. Approximately half the total Pacific population of the estimated 10 million people are below 20 years of age, with approximately 40 percent under 14 years of age, approximately 50 percent below 18 years of age. This population is spread out in 22 island countries and territories sprawled out in approximately 36 million square kilometres of ocean which makes up the Pacific islands region, approximately four times the size of China. Of this 36 million square kilometres, less than 2 percent is land.

6. The population ranges from less than 100 people in the smallest of the island country, Pitcairn island to about 8 million in Papua New Guinea. Population growth is a major issue in some islands, especially where space is limited. Natural disasters, climate change and rising sea levels are already causing additional problems for small island states.

7. The Pacific islands region is a maritime region characterised by geographical isolation, huge distances between countries, poor transport and communication, generally small populations spread out in small communities that makes the unit costs for providing services extremely expensive. Most Pacific economies are heavily reliant on development assistance and their ability to provide consistent social services, especially in health and education.

8. To address these inherent and naturally occurring vulnerabilities South-South cooperation in the Pacific is not an option but an imperative – except it is more commonly referred to as regional cooperation. The Pacific Plan will be renamed the ‘Framework for Pacific Regionalism’ to emphasise the desire by Ministers for greater cooperation and integration.
Examples of South-South cooperation in Pacific Island countries

9. Effective regional cooperation or South-South Cooperation is crucial in the Pacific islands region due mostly to economies of scale. Small island countries more often than not need to pool their resources or harmonise their positions to achieve results that go beyond the borders of individual countries. Below are some examples of South-South Cooperation between Pacific island countries. The list is not exhaustive. Its purpose is to demonstrate the types of cooperation encompassing a full range of areas.

SPC has been providing regional cooperation, scientific and technical support to its members since 1948. It is the largest regional organisation in the region working to support technical cooperation between members. SPC is also involved in South-South cooperation initiatives at the organisational level on behalf of Pacific island countries and territories. Examples of these include:

a. Cooperation and exchange of information between SPC and ASEAN on Pandemic preparedness,

b. Cooperation between SPC, ASEAN and SAARC through the Regional Steering Committee for GFTADs [Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Trans-boundary Animal Diseases] for Asia and the Pacific,

c. Cooperation between SPC and the Caribbean Community covering a range of areas including youth development, mainstreaming gender, developing cultural linkages, sharing education policies, collaborative health development, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and climate change.

d. Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) – this comprises the coordinating body for eleven Pacific regional organisations that have been established by Pacific island countries to implement specific regional priorities. SPC is the largest technical and scientific body in this group of organisations and its work covers a range of areas. CROP plays a crucial role in articulating priorities that are presented to the region’s leaders and which would normally be incorporated as part and parcel of the region’s top priorities to be addressed. Examples of such priorities include Energy, Food security, climate change, education, communication. Together with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the region’s premier political organisation which chairs CROP, SPC, the region’s premier technical and scientific organisation plays a crucial role in this process of prioritisation for consideration by the region’s leaders.

e. Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) - involving Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. The cooperation under MSG covers political, economic, social, cultural and developmental objectives. The MSG secretariat which is based in Vanuatu coordinates and implements the agenda for MSG which in a nutshell is about sustainable socio-cultural, economic and political development of MSG countries. The achievement of the MDGs is a key priority for the MSG secretariat and MSG countries.
f. *Micronesian Chief Executives Summit (MCES)* – comprising the chief executive offices and governors of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana islands (CNMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Guam, Republic of the Marshal Islands (RMI) and Republic of Palau.

g. *Micronesian Presidents Summit (MPS)* – comprise the Presidents of the FSM, Palau and RMI.

h. The *Polynesian Leaders Group* (PLG) is an international governmental cooperation group bringing together eight independent or self-governing countries or territories in Polynesia.

Both the MCES and MPS deal with development challenges such as energy, ICT, climate change, fisheries, public health, military build-up, transport, tourism, agriculture development all of which are crucial in supporting children and all of which also fall under the auspices of SPC at the regional level.

i. *Parties to the Nauru Agreement secretariat* – this is a specific partnership between eight countries in the Pacific that aims to improve the returns from tuna that is harvested from their exclusive economic zones. They include Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

j. *Small Islands States (SIS) feeder shipping service for Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu* – many island countries in the Pacific do not have regular shipping services as the routes are not profitable. For the small island countries this is a matter of survival. Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu have established a SIS feeder shippings service using Fiji as the hub port for trade between the four countries on a regular basis. This service has cut freight rates by almost 40 percent, improved regularity of trade and resulted in much reduced prices of products in the importing countries.

k. *Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA)* – this agreement provides a mechanisms for Pacific island countries to trade between themselves.

l. *Pacific Parliamentary Assembly on Population and Development (PPAPD)* – This is an assembly comprising members of parliament from fourteen Pacific island countries with common interest in population and development issues. They are involved with the MDGs, Youth, women and gender, HIV/AIDS and other human development priorities. They provide an excellent framework for further enhancing political action on child rights. SPC together with UNFPA supports the secretariat for this body. Recently PPAPD has been renamed Pacific Legislature for Population and Governance (PLPG) reflecting an expanded role that includes providing support to pacific legislatures.
The Pacific Plan for strengthening collaboration and integration among Pacific island countries and territories – the Pacific Plan was endorsed by Pacific Forum leaders in 2005 and has now evolved into a key strategic document for the Pacific islands region. While it is not a ‘blue print’ for development in the Pacific islands region, it provides a common framework from which a common vision for development and actions to achieve these visions across the region’s 22 island countries and territories are articulated. Pacific regional organisations play a significant role in implementing priorities of the Pacific Plan.

The Pacific Plan was reviewed in 2013 and some of the recommendations were presented to the PIF Leaders in Majuro in September 2013. The review process is yet to be finalised.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community in particular either leads or coordinate the work in the majority of the priority areas. The priorities are grouped under five categories as follows:

A. Fostering economic development and promoting opportunities for broad-based growth:
   i. Fisheries
   ii. Energy
   iii. Trade
   iv. Transport
   v. ICTs

B. Improving livelihoods and the well-being of Pacific peoples:
   i. Food security
   ii. Health
   iii. Education
   iv. Land
   v. Human development – gender equality, youth and culture

C. Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change:
   n. Climate Change

D. Achieving stronger national development through better governance:
   i. Statistics
   ii. Pacific Parliamentarian Assembly on Population and Development (PPAPD)

E. Ensuring Improved social, political and legal conditions for stability, safety and security:
   i. Human Security
   ii. Border security

In relation to the three themes for this year, SPC is the lead agency for the development of the Pacific Youth Strategy for the region and the Regional Rights Resource Team work in supporting the legislative developments on Violence Against Women among other activities.
Templates for South-South Cooperation on child rights

10. All the examples listed in paragraphs above provide templates for South-South cooperation among pacific island countries upon which child rights could be incorporated from the perspectives of the Pacific islands these platforms already exist. Each platform already has a direct or indirect link to the livelihood of all Pacific children. What is needed is to mainstream child rights agenda into the respective platforms to ensure that child rights become a measurable outcome indicator in each platform. This is where organisations such as SPC can become a channel through which this can be progressed at the regional level.

Specific Areas Where SPC can Progress the Child Rights Agenda

11. SPC does not have a child and adolescent agenda per se. However, the Secretariat works across approximately twenty different sectors including in agriculture, aquaculture, biosecurity, culture, disaster reduction, education, energy, fisheries, forestry, gender, geoscience, ICT, human rights, maritime boundaries, media, parliamentarians on population and development, public health, statistics and demography, transport, water & sanitation, youth, and cross-cutting areas including food security, gender, youth, culture, urbanisation and climate change. All of these areas directly or indirectly contribute to improving the wellbeing of children and young people in the Pacific and influence the environments in which they live.

12. In this respect SPC can work with other regional and international organisations and Pacific island governments to progress cooperation in child rights in all three themes of the current HLM through existing platforms;

   - Healthy Islands (Yanuca Declaration) 1995
   - Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF) 2014-2023
   - Pacific Education Development Framework 2009-2015

13. The Healthy Islands Vision was adopted by the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting (PHMM) held on Yanuca Island, Fiji in 1995. The vision was recently re-affirmed by the 10th PHMM held in Apia as the unifying statement for health development in the region (Apia Communique). Healthy Islands aspires to be a place where children are nurtured in mind and body and other expectations. Pacific Health Ministers called for actions at the country level to give effect to the Healthy Islands Vision.

14. The Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF) 2014-23 has been developed through a wide consultative process, including input from the Pacific Youth Council (PYC), regional and international organisations. The PYDF has identified 4 Outcome Areas as the priorities for work with young people over the next decade. These are;

   Outcome Area 1 – Youth Employment
Outcome Area 2 – Health
Outcome Area 3 – Governance and Participation
Outcome Area 4 - Environment

PYDF provides an excellent framework for progressing many of the potential policies and programmes that could address adolescent issues. The Regional Rights Resource Team at SPC also have existing arrangements with PICTs and other stakeholders that could be used to progress child and adolescent rights in the region.

Fulfilling Child Rights with Early Childhood Development

15. SPC is not directly involved in early childhood development policy development or service delivery. Nonetheless, it is involved in a number of sectors which has a bearing on the environments and opportunities for early childhood development and learning. The Education, Training and Human Development Division supports a number of initiatives that support human development and education, including gender equality, cultural diversity and disability.

16. The Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) was developed at the request of Pacific Islands Forum Economic Ministers and endorsed by all Forum Education Ministers (Tonga 2009). The PEDF is anchored on human rights particularly on the rights of the child (CRC). The PEDF will coordinate regional activities and provide advocacy and a leadership role in policy dialogue at the regional level. It guides but not direct the work of Ministries at the national level. PIFS is currently developing the M&E Framework to monitor and evaluate progress in countries and regional levels.

The Pacific Education Development Framework Vision: Quality education for all in Pacific Island countries

Strategic Goals:
1. To achieve universal and equitable participation and access to Pacific education and training. (Access & Equity)
2. To improve quality and outcomes. (Quality)
3. To achieve efficient and effective utilisation of resources ensuring balanced and sustained development of Pacific education systems. (Efficiency & Effectiveness)

SSE1: EARLY CARE & CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECCE)
High quality ECCE programmes can benefit countries by promoting cognitive performance of young children, increasing the efficiency of primary and secondary education, contributing to future productivity and income, reducing costs of health and other public services, reducing gender inequities and increasing female participation in the labour force. Although the research base is still relatively thin, particularly in the Pacific context, existing relevant studies do indicate a high social return on investment in ECCE. Studies have shown that attendance at some form of
preschool is a key determinant of the likelihood of completion of primary schooling. The further development of ECCE is a key priority of the PEDF. This is the initial access point to lifelong learning.

**Goals/targets: EFA Goal 1**: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

17. SPC also hosts the Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA). SPBEA is an intergovernmental, regional organisation set up in 1980 to assist the Pacific Island region and member countries to develop assessment procedures towards national and regional certificates. The Board administers two regional senior secondary school qualifications, the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate and the South Pacific Form Seven Certificate. It also plays a role in assisting countries to improve the quality of education through the use of good assessment practice and procedures. SPBEA's members include Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, plus Australia and New Zealand which are its main donors. SPBEA was recently reviewed by an independent group and the recommendations are being considered by SPC.

**Urban settings as an opportunity for realizing all child rights**

18. A number of divisions and programmes are designed to protect the natural environments in the region as well as assisting Pacific Islands with infrastructure, energy, water and waste management, and other areas. The work of SPC is directed at supporting sustainable development and use of resources, and as such, enables its members to create the right urban and rural environments to meet local priorities. Urban settings are particular vulnerable to natural disasters in view of increasing urbanisation in the region. SPC and other CROP agencies has developed several strategies as part of the Pacific Urban Agenda.

19. SPC will work more closely with the heads of the Pacific regional organisations (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific – CROP) and in particular with the premier political regional organisation in the Pacific, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the new Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) to include Child Rights as a top priority to be included in their development plans. The review of the Pacific Plan is a golden opportunity to include the rights of children and young people as a priority needing the attention of Pacific leaders. The new Pacific Plan is to be called a ‘Framework for Regionalism’. This provides a good foundation for progressing the child rights agenda in the Pacific region, linked to HLM objectives.

20. The process outlined above will provide a more strategic approach to mainstreaming child protection and welfare and child rights across all levels in Pacific island countries from the political, operational and community levels.

**South-South cooperation between Pacific island countries and Asian Countries**
21. Much of my statement has focussed on south-south cooperation and potential solutions among Pacific island countries and territories. This is necessarily our starting point in the Pacific. However with respect to achieving greater development outcomes for individual Pacific island countries there is greater benefits to be gained through South-South cooperation between Pacific island countries and Asian countries in the Asia Pacific region, both in respect to information sharing and exchange in appropriate technologies as well as in actual substantive partnerships between countries through mutual cooperation.

22. Many Asian countries have already incorporated or mainstreamed child protection and welfare and child rights outcome targets into their respective national development plans and strategies and resourced to ensure the expected outcomes are achieved. Some Pacific island countries are progressing in this direction and it would be immensely helpful for such countries to have the opportunity to visit some our neighbouring Asian countries that have progressed legislative or strategic reforms on child rights to observe their processes and see how some of these maybe adapted to Pacific island countries.

23. SPC remains committed to stepping up its cooperation with ASEAN and SAARC to progress areas of regional cooperation that would assist Pacific island countries and territories. It will also explore opportunities for strengthening enhanced cooperation for its members with individual countries in the Asian subregion of the Asia-Pacific region.

**Conclusion**

SPC is well placed to support initiatives in a range of sectors that would promote child rights and progress activities that support the three themes of the 2013 HLM on Child Rights in Asia and the Pacific.

PICTs may wish to use existing platforms to progress measurable changes in one or more of the theme areas agree a process going forwards. This could include inter-HLM events whereby PICTs could come together to discuss progress, share knowledge and experiences and prepare for the next HLM. SPC would be happy to facilitate such events as required.