

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SHORT TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT

Technical Advisory for ECE in the Pacific

BACKGROUND

Over the past years, Pacific countries have secured gains in early childhood education (ECE) access and are increasingly looking at expanding quality of ECE with an aim to ensure that all children build the foundations for learning needed for success in school and beyond. Indeed, this is a concern as regional assessment data show key challenges for learning outcomes. Year 4 Numeracy results showed 67% (72% female, 63% male) of students performed at or above the minimum proficiency level in numeracy. The results for reading are even more concerning with only 43% (49% female, 37% male) of Year 4 student performing at or above the expected standard.

Pacific Island countries have traditionally had less government oversight of ECE in comparison to other levels of education. With many countries now having identified ensuring access to quality, inclusive, ECE as a priority, there is increasing government mandate, focus and resourcing of the sub-sector within national systems and ensuring evidence based programmes are implemented in ECE classrooms. This is in line within the 2023 Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM) outcomes statement, which confirmed ECE as a priority for the region. Governments are also envisioning to address inclusion (including gender and disability) in the early years, by really empowering school systems and teachers to tackle social norms, inequality and discrimination starting with the youngest learners.

ECE is the focus of a number of regional goods and country level activities under the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) implementation rolling plan.

A Pacific regional early childhood education taskforce (PRECET) has been formed to provide strategic guidance at regional level on advocacy and awareness, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, research and analysis and policy development and review to improve strengthening the country level actions in ECE, keeping including addressing gender transformation and disability inclusion issues in the early years . The PRECET has led the development and launch of the Status Report on ECE Systems in 15 Pacific Island Countries and Territories and is currently leading a Regional Review of ECE Curricula in 15 Pacific Countries and development of a Pacific ECE Systems Planning and Review Toolkit. In addition, this taskforce has contributed to a Pacific Employability, Transferrable, and All-Life Skills (PETALS) Framework. These activities are part of the PacREF implementation rolling plan.

This taskforce reports formally to the Pacific Heads of Education System (PHES), and is responsible to support implementation of the Joint Statement of Priorities for ECE endorsed by PHES in March 2024, and also to the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development (PRC4ECD) in line with that TOR.

UNICEF is working with Pacific countries to strengthen ECE systems and programmes within the region, ensuring attention to climate resilience, culture, gender transformation and disability inclusion and also linking to multisectoral early childhood development . This support includes working on ECE systems strengthening initiatives that contribute to improving ECE planning and budgeting, curriculum development and implementation, workforce development, family and community engagement and quality assurance functions within their education systems and targeted support to development and roll out of ECE curriculum, teacher training and quality standards which contribute to classroom level changes. Countries are further aligning regional initiatives and frameworks with country-level system strengthening initiatives, and have developed and rolled out early learning standards, training of ECE teachers on quality play-based pedagogies, teaching and learning materials, and capacity building on ECE monitoring.

Countries are also developing education sector plans, which includes significant focus on ECE. ECE has been integrated within education priority reforms in a number of Pacific countries which is reflected in their partnership compacts, key country specific documents led and defined by countries as part of accessing funding from global

partnership of education (GPE). To further inform education sector plans and programme development under Systems Transformation Grant (STG) (to support implementation of the priority reform), countries are also undertaking Gender-Disability-Social Inclusion Analysis studies which will include conclusions and recommendations on GEDSI issues for early years.

The leadership of initiatives by PRECET, at regional-level, and the ECE programme leads in Governments at country-level, are critical to ensure the relevance and ownership of ECE efforts, yet there are gaps in availability of technical guidance grounded in research and best practice from the Pacific region. Research and evidence generation on ECE, including drawing upon evidences for ECE from other ongoing studies in Pacific, is a critical need to inform PRECET as the taskforce leads ECE activities. Furthermore, there is a critical need to provide dedicated and consistent support to the PRECET well-grounded in Pacific regional working approaches and structures and priorities (including other priorities set by CPEM and PRC4ECD). There is also need to support PRECET on articulating key evidence based strategies to address issues of culture, climate resilience, gender and disability in early years.

The Pacific is at a critical juncture for ECE, with growing interest and investment in ECE, and some important new bodies of experience and analysis that reflect culturally- and contextually grounded visions for quality and inclusive ECE that successfully contribute to building foundational learning and skills for all children in Pacific Island countries. A technical advisor able to draw on global evidence, experience and tools where relevant, but prioritizing the development and adaptation of Pacific programmatic approaches, research and plans from the Pacific, is needed to provide relevant support to the Pacific regional and national agendas for ECE.

OBJECTIVES/SCOPE OF WORK

The objective of this consultancy is to work toward ensuring that every Pacific child, irrespective of gender, special needs and vulnerabilities, can learn and develop to their full potential, including through access to high quality, relevant and inclusive early childhood education and transitions to primary school, gaining the foundational learning and skills they need as building blocks for success in school and beyond.

The purpose of this consultancy is to provide technical and advisory support to Pacific Island Countries and to the PRECET on Pacific-led early childhood education (ECE) research and analysis, system strengthening (in the areas of policies and legislation; financing; ministerial leadership and capacity; planning and budgeting) and in curriculum development and implementation; workforce development; family and community engagement; and quality assurance in the Pacific countries and coordination mechanisms.

Technical advice on ECE. Considerable progress is being made with strengthening ECE both at regional and country level in the Pacific. To ensure continuous support on this, the consultant will provide strategic technical advice on ECE, including by providing:

- technical reviews and support to the development, adaptation and implementation of inclusive and gender transformative and culturally grounded ECE tools and resilient programme models, drawing on global or regional experiences and expertise as relevant, but with a focus on ensuring relevance to Pacific cultures, contexts and systems;
- technical reviews and support to regional and national ECE research and analyses, with attention to culture disability inclusion, gender transformation and climate resilience; contribute to review of research on initiatives and help to facilitate internal and external reviews of research and co-design recommendations to support ECE work.

Technical Support to PRECET. As mentioned above, the PRECET has been formed with a mandate to guide and ensure action for ECE in the Pacific. The consultant will therefore provide technical support to the taskforce; as well as supporting ECE related issues in other regional taskforces.:

- Provide technical support to the PRECET to develop and operationalize an inclusive ECE action plan to implement the Joint Statement of Priorities in ECE.

- Support the taskforce in contributing to PHES and PRC4ECD agendas (as well as other regional strategies like 2050 and Pacific Culture strategy) to ensure ECE is well articulated
- Support the PRECET to develop regional advocacy initiatives to ensure inclusive ECE is solidly reflected in all regional education and crosscutting agendas.

Technical support on research on Initiatives: Pacific countries work on identifying, assessing and adapting evidence-based initiatives to fit the Pacific context in order to advance the work of ECE in the Region. The consultant will conduct desk research (e.g. of in-service teacher training and strategies), conduct surveys, and/or other analyses on key topics of relevance to ECE priorities in the region and ensure the learnings are shared and effectively articulated to be used for ECE programming in region including in the work led by PRECET. Review other sectoral and cross sectoral researches and studies including GEDSI to draw critical conclusions and recommendations relevant to ECE and ensure these are integrated in programming.

Additional technical support: ECE priorities in Pacific are continuously emerging and UNICEF as key partner in the region and implementing agency under PacREF is committed to respond proactively and continuously to these priorities which substantially includes providing technical support to different tasks.

The consultant, with guidance from the Early Childhood Education Specialist, will develop a quarterly workplan, which will guide the planning and provision of technical support, to be reported on a monthly basis. Monthly reports will document results achieved, support activities undertaken toward those results, and recommendations for the way forward, including necessary revisions to the workplan. The consultant will work in close coordination with the ECE Specialist and Education Specialists and Officers in Field Offices.

ACTIVITIES, DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINES, PLUS PAYMENT SCHEDULE PER DELIVERABLE

ACTIVITY	DELIVERABLES	ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE	PAYMENT (%)
Technical advice on ECE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical review and inputs on ECE analyses, policies and plans provided for Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, Nauru, Niue and other relevant Pacific countries. (15 days) • Technical support provided to review and development of ECE programme components within STGs, as identified by Pacific countries. (15 days) 		
Technical Support to PRECET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalised ECE action plan to operationalize Joint Statement of Priorities in ECE. (10 days) • Strategic agenda, briefings and documentation of follow-up plans and actions for the PRECET, including supporting them to input into other regional agendas. (20 days) • Support development and roll out of regional advocacy messages in ECE. (10 days) 		
Technical support to research Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support UNICEF ECE team in designing and implementing research studies on ECE on areas like quality, formative 		

	<p>assessment and other emerging priorities in at least 2 Pacific countries (15 days)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 5 surveys/ factsheets or other analyses on key topics of interest in ECE (e.g. culture, climate, etc.) developed and disseminated (15 days) • Additional technical support briefs. 		

QUALIFICATIONS, SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE AND ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES

Minimum Qualifications required:

Bachelors Masters PhD Other

- Masters or higher degree in education, child development, early childhood education or related field.
- Minimum of 15 years of working experience in early childhood development and/or early childhood education, or Education.
- Relevant experience in conducting and analysing research and supporting regional and country level coordination mechanisms with a strong focus on strengthening early childhood education systems.
- Experience in Pacific Island countries required. Candidates from, or with ties to, Pacific Island Countries, strongly preferred.
- The consultant is expected to understand relevant government departments and partners that already exists, what they consider relevant and what will be most useful and ensure these learning leads the development of the methodology and approach of the consultancy.
- Excellent writing skills and ability to synthesize complex information and issues.
- Strong analytical and conceptual thinking.
- Ability to organize and plan complex work following the established timeframes.
- Ability to plan, coordinate, manage and facilitate high-level meetings.
- Previous experience working for UNICEF or another international organization an asset.

CONDITIONS OF WORK AND CLARIFICATION ON SUPERVISION

The consultant is expected to kick start the consultancy remotely. Out of 7 months there will be 100 working days (70 remote and 30 in Fiji) in this contract.

The consultant will be supervised by Early Childhood Education Specialist, UNICEF Pacific. All deliverables will be submitted in draft form and reviewed by UNICEF with the expectation that feedback will be integrated in the final version of each deliverable submitted for payment. Payments will be made on the basis of approved deliverables by the Chief of Education at UNICEF Pacific.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants. Consultants are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- The selected candidate is solely responsible to ensure that the visa (applicable) and health insurance required to perform the duties of the contract are valid for the entire period of the contract. Selected candidates are subject to confirmation of fully vaccinated status against SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) with a World Health Organization (WHO)-endorsed vaccine, which must be met prior to taking up the assignment. It does not apply to consultants who will work remotely and are not expected to work on or visit UNICEF premises, programme delivery locations or directly interact with communities UNICEF works with, nor to travel to perform functions for UNICEF for the duration of their consultancy contracts. UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.
- No contract may commence unless the contract is signed by both UNICEF and the consultant.

- Consultant will be required to complete mandatory online courses (e.g. Ethics, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Security) upon receipt of offer and before the signature of contract.

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

All applications should be submitted with a cover letter, CV with minimum three references, technical proposal defining the approach and methodology for executing the consultancy with critical consideration on how a strong Pacific approach will be adopted and financial proposal in US dollars with per day professional fees, health insurance (including medical evacuation for international consultants), communications, and other items. If the consultant plans to include other expertise in the consultancy, the same should be reflected in the application including in the financial proposal. Institutions that apply for this consultancy will be required to submit the organization profile, a sample of relevant previous work undertaken in the last two years. The consultancy is expected to have their own laptop, camera, mobile phones and other relevant communications and working equipment.

The evaluation methodology is based on a highest combined score (based on the 40% relevant experience from CV, 30% technical proposal and 30% price weight distribution) at the initial paper screening stage, followed by virtual blended interviews. Virtual blended interview will be conducted by a panel, consisting of UNICEF Fiji Office. The conclusion of selection process will be forwarded to the internal UNICEF Contracts Review Committee or other relevant approving authority.