

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SHORT TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT

Consultant for development of FSM's national ECE Curriculum Framework and supporting adaptation of state ECE curricula in all 4 states.

BACKGROUND

The Federated States of Micronesia is a federal system of government in the north Pacific, comprising 4 states, each with their own constitution, language, and education system, including ECE curriculum and teacher development programmes. The State Department of Education (SDoE) in each state is responsible for developing and implementing their own ECE curriculum and teacher development, while the National Department of Education (NDoE) provides the overall curriculum and learning standards, and student learning outcomes and benchmarks for both. Each state also has a unique culture and language.

The FSM National Minimum Competency Test (2023) shows that, on average, more than 70 per cent of the students are not meeting the minimum standards for mathematics and reading in Grades 4,6,8 and 10. The test results for Grade 4 mathematics highlight the lack of foundational numeracy skills amongst the students from an early grade – only 9 per cent of the students are competent and understand the concepts and skills in the minimum learning outcomes indicating that more than 90 per cent are struggling to grasp the basic concepts and skills. The 2021 Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) also show a worrisome picture with almost half or 45 per cent of grade five students unable to meet the minimum expected proficiency standards in numeracy and more than half, 65 per cent, in reading. The fact that a substantial proportion of students at the end of early primary are not meeting minimum proficiency in numeracy and literacy is surely a result of many factors, yet global evidence on the link of quality early childhood education (ECE) to later learning outcomes points to a need to ensure quality and inclusive teaching and learning in ECE. While there is no data linking learning outcomes to dimensions of disability and impact of climate change, these and other forms of vulnerability are expected to have pronounced impact on learning outcomes. While there are no differences in performance between boys and girls, the national averages often mask sub-national disparities and therefore there is need to pay attention to gender as well.

Participation in quality inclusive resilient Early Childhood Education (ECE) will equip the learners to gain the necessary skills needed to increase their readiness on literacy and numeracy, as well as other life skills and will set a strong foundation to learn when they enter primary school. The government of FSM has expressed a national commitment to make ECE compulsory in 2024 for all 5-year-old children across the country. With the roll out of compulsory ECE in all 4 states, ECE will be made available to all 5-year-olds, including children with disabilities and learning challenges and children in most vulnerable communities affected by climate change. With the intent to continue to maintain the distinct identities and systems of the individual states, there is now an interest in establishing a national curriculum framework in order to establish core expectations and guidance for ECE in FSM, and ensure a minimum common alignment of services for all children across FSM, while still ensuring the flexibility needed for locally relevant adaptations in each state. ECE in FSM is led by National Department of Education (NDOE) at national level and state level by the four State Departments of Education in Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk and Kosrae respectively.

All 4 states of FSM have their own ECE curricula and aligned teaching learning materials at present and these curricula are being implemented. The NDOE has developed early learning standards at the national level which will be key inputs to the national ECE curriculum framework. In addition, FSM is also focusing on supporting professional development of ECE teachers to ensure they have the support and are equipped with critical skills needed to improve teaching learning particularly for children with special needs.

FSM in partnership with UNICEF is also conducting a study on the impact of climate change on education which includes key findings relevant for ECE subsector. The study is underway with initial findings available.

In addition to the national commitment to advance compulsory ECE, FSM, as one of the 15 Pacific countries, is expanding access to and participation in quality ECE through opportunities under the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF), with several regional activities that may inform this work in FSM. A Pacific Regional Review of ECE Curricula for 15 countries, including the 4 states of FSM, has been conducted under PacREF, with support from UNICEF, with an intent to identify common trends, challenges and good practices in ECE across the Pacific will also be available soon, which includes review of the available curricula documents in FSM. The recently launched Pacific Employability Transferable and All Life Skills (PETALS) Framework developed through leadership of the 15 Pacific countries including FSM, with support from UNESCO under PacREF presents opportunities for FSM to identify the key relevant skills that need to be promoted through the national ECE curriculum framework. FSM is also piloting relevant tools to support ECE teachers to assess, respond, track and report on school readiness with support from EQAP and is contributing to development of Pacific regional ECE teacher competency framework with support from University of South Pacific, under PacREF; all of which will contribute to the development and roll out of FSM's national curriculum framework.

FSM has identified and defined their education priority reform articulated in the Education Partnership Agreement (EPA 2023), as *“Mainstreaming, strengthening and resourcing indigenous knowledge and its learning and teaching approaches in curriculum delivery”* to bring about transformational change in education for FSM. The EPA is thus a key resource providing direction for the expected approaches and outcomes to be defined in the curriculum framework at both the national and state levels, and accordingly inform the recommendations for the supporting implementation plan for delivery of the curriculum as well.

While there are a variety of available reflections and analyses of ECE curricula in the FSM, there remains a need to define and implement a participatory, consultative and technically robust process to develop and roll out a national ECE curriculum framework that draws from the individual strengths and implementation experience of each state, while also outlining a clear common national vision for ECE across all states, which will enable adaptation of the state curricula to the national curriculum framework. There is also a critical need to link to other recent and ongoing national efforts and interventions to enhance ECE quality in FSM and synergize with the several ECE initiatives under PacREF, as defined above, to ensure improved learning at ECE level.

OBJECTIVE / SCOPE OF WORK

The overall objective of this consultancy is to strengthen the relevance and quality of early childhood education in the FSM.

The purpose of this consultancy is to *develop FSM's national ECE curriculum framework; to support the revision, alignment and adaptation of the ECE curricula in each of 4 states to the national ECE curriculum framework; and to develop training modules on the national ECE curriculum framework with adapted versions of each state curricula for training of ECE on rolling out ECE curricula in the states.*

The consultancy will need to adopt a well-coordinated approach within the context of the ECE system of the FSM, including other ongoing and planned initiatives.

1. Desk review and Inception Report

- a) Conduct a desk review of national early learning standards, ECE curricula and aligned teaching and learning materials for all 4 states of FSM. This would include all other relevant documents, including the partnership agreement, Grade 1 curricula, revised February 2023 standards and guidance, climate

change in education study report, and any other relevant national documents (e.g., NDP, Education Policies/Plans, Transforming Education Statement of Commitment), as well as regional documents such as the ECE curriculum review, the PETALS Framework, the Pacific Inclusive Education Review, etc. This should also specifically attend to expectations for foundational literacy, numeracy and life/transferrable skills (including resilience), culture, inclusion and values. The review should ensure a strong gender and inclusion lens, which must feed into the synthesis, methodology and proposal for the final deliverables.

- b) Produce a synthesis report and consolidated visual presentation reflecting a synthesis of all existing documents, including a mapping of curricula/standards/assessment (e.g., by learning domains, by approach to assessment, etc.), identifying common trends, variations, good practices, challenges and potential gaps and present at inception meetings with NDOE and UNICEF (and others, as determined relevant). Identify and resolve questions that will feed into the methodology and other relevant aspects of the inception phase at these meetings.
- c) Produce inception report with clearly proposed methodology for the scope of work, including plans for government and non-government stakeholder engagement, and clear plans to ensure the ownership, relevance and cultural grounding of each curriculum, as well as the proposed approaches for producing curricula and training materials that can be delivered in the language of each state. Update and finalize methodology, timeline and mapping in the inception report through consultations with NDOE and UNICEF.

2. First Draft National ECE Curriculum Framework

- a) Through a highly participatory approach, with NDOE in the lead, develop the first draft of FSM's national ECE curriculum framework, that defines a shared and forward-looking vision of inclusive and culturally-grounded learning for every young child at ECE level preparing to transition to Grade 1, and how the systems at national and sub-national level, schools and ECE and grade 1 teacher will collaboratively work towards fulfilling the vision. It is expected that:
 - i) Grounded in FSM's cultural context and diversity in States, the national curriculum framework will clearly establish the country's vision for children's learning at the foundational stage across all domains of development. This vision must be set within the context of FSM's priority reform as articulated in the Education Partnership Agreement 2023, of "repositioning, strengthening and resourcing indigenous knowledge and its learning and teaching approaches in curriculum delivery", all with a view to ensure that "learning and teaching is grounded in and takes place within indigenous knowledge context, concepts and transferable competencies".
 - ii) The domains of development should align in relevant ways to Grade 1 curricula, while protecting the unique holistic, developmentally appropriate and other elements of quality ECE programmes.
 - iii) The curriculum framework should take into account the current real time challenges of teaching and learning in ECE and primary classrooms and develop an approach built around critical components of (a) teaching at the right level including supporting children with disabilities (b) prioritizing learning and skills including skills identified in PETALS framework (c) formative assessment (building on ongoing work under another initiative as relevant) (d) managing transition as children come from home to preschool and transition from preschool to formal schools, (e) guidance on teaching learning materials and other relevant components.
 - iv) In addition to ECE and primary teachers, the curriculum framework should provide targeted guidance for systems level support and school management level support for ensuring learning at ECE. This guidance will be in different areas including teacher professional development, parental and community engagement, monitoring curriculum implementation and provision of onsite support, and other relevant areas.

- v) The national ECE curriculum framework will draw heavily on strengths and commonalities across state ECE curricula, while also extending beyond these as relevant to reflect the national vision.
- vi) The national ECE curriculum framework will ensure that gender is solidly integrated in the curriculum framework. Points of consideration may include the following:
 - a. Ensure curriculum content is free of gender bias
 - b. Curriculum suggest ways in which the teacher can engage boys and girls in particular
 - c. Activities by making the content more relevant to the different interests and life experiences of boys and girls
 - d. Ensure teaching approaches ensure that teachers apply gender responsive pedagogy
 - e. Provide teachers with guidance on creating a gender-responsive learning environment in which both girls and boys feel welcome and comfortable.
 - f. Identify and address any barriers to effective implementation of a gender-responsive curriculum in ECE classrooms, and how can these be tackled.
 - g. Ensure learning objectives set are promoting gender equality and explicit thematic content is included on gender norms, values, behaviors are included.
 - h. Ensure competencies set are relevant to the achievement of gender equality
 - i. Guidance on gender responsive teaching and learning materials and effective promotion of gender equality using those materials

3. Facilitate validation workshops with states

The consultant is expected to co-design and implement a series of consultative workshops with SDOE and partners in each state for all for 4 states, where the draft ECE curriculum framework will be validated and feedback from states will be collated for revising the draft. NDOE and SDOE teams will support the roll out of the validation workshops, but the consultant will be responsible for end-to-end design and successful implementation of the workshops including clear documentation of the feedback. The consultant will ensure clear analysis of the feedback from the workshops and present back to NDOE, SDOEs and UNICEF and develop an agreed approach and plan to undertake the revisions needed.

4. Second draft of national curriculum framework

Based on the feedback received during validation workshops the consultant will revise the curriculum framework and develop a second draft of the national curriculum framework. The second draft is expected to be used for revising, aligning and adapting the state ECE curricula, so the consultant will be expected to develop a process of adapting the state ECE curricula based on the second draft.

5. Support revision, alignment and adaptation of the ECE curricula of each of 4 states to the national ECE curriculum framework

Building on the desk review and the work on development of national ECE framework, the Consultant will further partner with SDOEs in each state and undertake revision, alignment and adaptation of ECE curriculum in each state for all 4 states in line with the national curriculum framework. This includes revising, aligning and adapting a set of curricular documents in each state (identified during desk review phase). For each state the revision and adaptation process will be defined in discussion with the SDOE and will need to be consultative and participatory. At the end of this activity, each state will have a revised and adapted ECE curriculum aligned to the national ECE curriculum framework. The revision and adaptation process will need to consistently include crosscutting elements of culture, disability inclusion, gender and climate resilience as explained earlier.

6. Finalization of FSM's National ECE Curriculum Framework

Based on further feedback and insights documented during the adaptation of ECE curricula to the national ECE curriculum framework for every state, finalize the ECE curriculum framework and develop a PowerPoint presentation explaining the curriculum framework and how it is intended to be used.

While the consultant will be responsible to carry out the deliverables in the consultancy, she/he will closely collaborate with a specially formed national technical working group for ECE curriculum development (appointed by NDOE) who will provide input and support all review processes, implementation, and any other relevant steps beyond the scope of this terms of reference. The consultant is also expected to get technical inputs and review from early childhood and inclusive education experts from UNICEF, and to coordinate with Technical Assistance (TA) and initiatives supported by government and other partners for a well-aligned ECE and early learning system in the FSM.

The consultancy involves at least 2 in country missions with at least 35 days in each mission and travel to all 4 states will be needed.

ACTIVITIES, DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINES, PLUS BUDGET PER DELIVERABLE

| ACTIVITY | DELIVERABLES | ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE (days) | PAYMENT |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Prepare a desk review and comprehensive inception plan to undertake the consultancy | Desk review report and inception report | | |
| 2. Develop first draft ECE Curriculum Framework | First Draft national ECE curriculum framework | | |
| 3. Support revision and adaptation of state ECE curriculum in each state for all 4 states | Final version of revised and adapted ECE curricula developed and submitted for all 4 states | | |
| 4. Finalization of the national ECE curriculum framework and submission | Final national ECE curriculum framework developed and submitted | | |

QUALIFICATIONS, SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE AND ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES

Bachelors Masters PhD Other

- Minimum of 8 years of working experience in early childhood education, including development and roll out of relevant ECE curriculum.
- Experience in inclusive early learning assessment and in-service ECE teacher training will be an asset.
- Experience in FSM and/or other Pacific Island countries is an asset.
- Experience with indigenous teaching and learning is an asset.
- Demonstrated familiarity with promoting foundational learning through play-based approaches
- 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.
- Ability to work effectively with others.

CONDITIONS OF WORK AND CLARIFICATION ON SUPERVISION

The consultant will be supervised by the Education Specialist, UNICEF North Pacific Office. Additional supervision and technical guidance will be provided by NDoE and SDoEs as relevant and Early Childhood

Education Specialist, UNICEF Pacific. All deliverables will be submitted in draft form and reviewed by NDOE and UNICEF with the expectation that feedback will be integrated into the final version of each deliverable submitted for approval for payment. The consultancy will be home based and a minimum of 2 ips to FSM adn in is required and should be included in the Consultants financial proposal.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract 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 and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual Revised February 2023 contractors 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/contractor.
- Consultant/Contractor 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. The below is to be included in the advert.

NOTE FOR CONSULTANTS: The applicants are requested to submit a technical proposal explaining the methodology for undertaking the consultancy. Please submit a separate financial offer along with your application. The financial proposal should be a lump sum amount for all the deliverables but should show a break down for the following:

- Monthly / Daily fees– based on the deliverables in the Terms of Reference
- Travel (economy air ticket where applicable to take up assignment if in country support is required, as well as any in country travel)
- Living allowance for international consultants
- Miscellaneous- to cover visa, health insurance (including medical evacuation for international consultants), communications, and other costs.