

## **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT**

### **A. Social Development in the Pacific Region**

1. The human development index scores vary across the Pacific region from 0.51 for Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to relatively high levels for Fiji (0.73) and Palau (0.78). Pacific region countries have recorded mixed outcomes in terms of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the Cook Islands achieved all MDGs and Fiji, Palau, and Tonga achieved more than half of them, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands did not achieve any of the MDGs by 2015. The reasons for this are varied and include poor data and monitoring and weak implementation capacity. The Sustainable Development Goals are more comprehensive (including targets on social inclusion and livelihoods), and will require investments in monitoring systems and strong stewardship to track progress.

#### **1. Education**

2. Pacific region developing member countries (DMCs) have made significant progress toward universal education by making primary education more accessible and eliminating fees. As a result, more children who would otherwise not have attended school are in education.<sup>1</sup> More progress is needed to achieve universal primary education in selected DMCs (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu), where reported net primary school enrollment rates are below 90%.<sup>2</sup>

3. The shortage of well-trained teachers combined with low teacher salaries make it hard to attract new teachers. There is a focus across DMCs on improving the quality of teachers, ensuring that the education systems are relevant and effective, and expanding the accessibility to secondary education. Some Pacific region DMCs are exploring the use of performance-based management systems to provide incentives for teacher performance. School assessments are widely used to test student performance, particularly after primary school, but more rigorous assessment of education outcomes is required to help ensure that increased expenditure is targeted effectively to improve academic results.

4. Advances in information and communication technology connectivity present opportunities to significantly expand learning opportunities for Pacific region DMCs, especially through learning platforms offered by regional organizations such as the University of the South Pacific. Enabling learners to acquire practical, market-relevant technical and vocational education and training qualifications in the later years of secondary education can increase the employment prospects of high school graduates. Furthermore, second-chance skills development offerings can give those unable to complete formal education an opportunity to gain the skills needed for employment.

5. Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste have invested in education information systems but other countries lack reliable data, which prevents basic analysis, informed decision making, and effective monitoring of education systems.

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<sup>1</sup> See linked document 1 for details on access to basic social services, and Table 6 for country data on spending on health, education, and social protection.

<sup>2</sup> See linked document 1 for more information on basic education and its benefits.

## **2. Health**

6. All Pacific region DMCs except the Federated States of Micronesia have a national health plan. Most national strategies support the promotion of healthy behaviors and lifestyle habits and address health issues related to infectious diseases and sexual and reproductive health.

7. Pacific region DMCs face a particular challenge with respect to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), which are the leading cause of death, ranging from an estimated 60% of deaths in Solomon Islands to 77% of deaths in Fiji. The proportion of people affected by NCDs is expected to rise substantially because of the high prevalence of NCD risk factors (tobacco use, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diet) across the Pacific region. The seven most obese countries in the world are all in the Pacific region. In smaller countries, where specialized medical care is unavailable, NCDs are a major driver of overseas medical referrals which are paid for by the government. As a consequence, a significant component of government health expenditure benefits only a small fraction of the population. An additional rising concern across the region is the spread of drug-resistant tuberculosis, especially in Kiribati and Papua New Guinea, because of weak health systems.

8. Basic health coverage and access is universal in most countries and is publicly subsidized, although funding is concentrated on curative services rather than preventative health. Only a few countries have national health insurance schemes that require defined purchaser-provider relationships. Public expenditure on health is much larger as a percentage of gross domestic product in the Pacific region than it is in lower- and middle-income countries globally, and it is growing with the NCD burden. Pacific region DMCs face the challenge of sustaining increased public health expenditure in an environment of low rates of economic growth and high vulnerability to external economic shocks and natural disasters.

9. Although there is a commitment to strengthen health information systems to move away from paper-based data collection across the region, there is no consensus on which type of system and software is appropriate. Therefore, shortcomings persist in the way health statistics are collected, analyzed, and reported. Overall, health system management, particularly the quality of health data collection and use, is identified as an area in need of strengthening across the region.

## **3. Social Protection**

10. Social protection systems are becoming increasingly critical as the proportion of elderly citizens increases as demographic transition progresses, and traditional communal support systems are weakened by migration and cultural change (Appendix 3, para. 24). Few Pacific region DMCs have an explicitly defined strategy of poverty reduction or social protection, although most have some form of social protection programs for the vulnerable (elderly, children, people with disabilities, and women) and in times of natural disaster. Most of these programs are implemented by different government agencies with little coordination. The bulk of social assistance is delivered through nongovernment and community organizations, presenting an opportunity to establish formal partnerships to channel public resources through community-based mechanisms. Effort is required to move to a coordinated portfolio of public and private interventions addressing the different dimensions of poverty and deprivation, with the aim to reduce vulnerability across the life cycle and generations.

#### 4. Gender

11. Significant efforts have been made to prioritize gender across the Pacific region and eliminate gender-based violence. In several Pacific region DMCs it is estimated that more than 50% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, inflicted by an intimate partner. Many countries are committed to eliminating gender-based violence through enacting legislation and providing services (such as shelters and legal support) to survivors, in addition to training health care professionals, police officers, and other authorities to identify the perpetrators and victims and respond effectively.

12. Levels of female and male enrollment in primary school are equitable, with only a slight difference in secondary school, where more males are reported than females. Women's labor force participation rates are highest in Solomon Islands (67%) and Cook Islands (65%), but lowest in Timor-Leste (21%) and Samoa (24%). However, the level of women's participation in paid employment tends to be low (14%–35%, with the Cook Islands the exception at 59%), and even then women are predominantly employed in less-secure micro businesses.<sup>3</sup> The gender gap in labor force participation is particularly apparent in the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Timor-Leste, and Nauru (Appendix 3, Annex 1, Table 5). Most Pacific region DMCs have relatively high total fertility rates and low contraceptive prevalence rates. However, fertility rates are declining because of improved education and job opportunities for women.

13. Increasing women's representation in politics at the national and local levels is key to achieving gender equality goals. Except for Timor-Leste, where nearly 39% of parliamentarians are women, most countries in the Pacific region have few or no women in national parliament. In 2006, Timor-Leste introduced quotas that guarantee women's representation as parliamentary candidates; Samoa followed suit in 2013 with a temporary special measure guaranteeing that 10% of parliamentarians are women. In 2016, the Marshall Islands parliament elected a new president, Hilda Heine, who is the first female head of state of any independent Pacific region DMC.

#### B. ADB Sector Experience and Assistance Program

14. Development assistance has been critical in supporting social sector development in the Pacific. The main development partners in the social sectors are the governments of Australia and New Zealand, the European Union, and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund. In Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of the Marshall Islands, the United States provides significant external financing for social sector expenditures as part of the Compact of Free Association. ADB and the World Bank have provided technical support for social development issues.

15. ADB social sector engagement has comprised a small proportion of the portfolio, and there is a commonly held view that governments were unwilling to borrow for such investments when significant grant financing was available and there are few relevant specialists among Pacific Department staff. On the other hand, considerable advances have been made in mainstreaming gender into all ADB projects. This has created nontraditional jobs for women, involved more women on the boards of state-owned enterprises, and ensured infrastructure

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<sup>3</sup> All Pacific region DMCs include own-use production of goods (subsistence) in their definition of employment, except for the Cook Islands and Timor-Leste; the paid employment rate is a more internationally comparable figure.

design takes into account the specific needs of women and girls as well as men. ADB has also had some project engagement in the education and health sectors, and has piloted some innovative social development interventions through the use of technical assistance and grant financing. Large interventions have been undertaken with other development partners that have deeper sector experience.

## **C. The Way Forward**

### **1. Education**

16. ADB will substantially increase financial and technical support to education, building on its track record of investments in basic education and distance education in the Pacific region. It will expand the use of information and communication technology to improve the quality, management, and cost efficiency of education service delivery in widely dispersed and isolated areas.

### **2. Health and Social Protection**

17. ADB will help Pacific region DMCs rise to the challenge of providing and sustainably financing health care by developing integrated climate-proofed health projects in partnership with technical agencies; more fully optimizing the health outcomes of infrastructure investments (transport, information and communication technology, energy, urban development, and water and sanitation) while mitigating their potential adverse health impacts; and selectively supporting regional public health initiatives to secure economies of scale in areas such as vaccination and health insurance. All ADB-supported health projects will mainstream gender to improve women's access to health services and prevent and respond to gender-based violence, and country capacity for gender-sensitive planning and project development will be strengthened. ADB will seek to increase its assistance for social protection in accordance with the Strategy 2020 midterm review's<sup>4</sup> enhanced emphasis on reducing vulnerability and inequality.

### **3. Gender**

18. ADB will continue to mainstreaming gender into all ADB projects to ensure the specific needs of both women and men are met by the projects, and the potential project benefits and opportunities for women are maximized. Promoting equitable inclusion in access to services, especially in health and education, will be supported by these mainstreaming efforts. Emphasis will also be placed on empowering women to become more active in the formal economy, including through training women in technical and business development skills, facilitating their access to finance and markets, and providing entrepreneurship mentoring.

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<sup>4</sup> ADB. 2014. *Midterm Review of Strategy 2020: Meeting the Challenges of a Transforming Asia and Pacific*. Manila.