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THE PACIFIC PLAN

The attached paper, prepared by the Forum Secretariat, provides information on the development of the Pacific Plan.

**THE PACIFIC PLAN
FOR STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION
AND INTEGRATION**

Purpose

To brief Ministers on progress in the development of the Pacific Plan

Background

2. Pacific Leaders recognised, through their April 2004 Auckland Declaration, that the serious challenges facing the countries of the Pacific require sharing scarce resources and aligning policies to strengthen national capacities to support their people. They have called for a Pacific Plan to strengthen regional cooperation and integration as the main instrument for realizing their Pacific Vision.

3. The Pacific Plan Working Draft is being developed by a Task Force of officials from all Forum countries and representatives from regional organizations, managed by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General and consulting with a Core Group of Leaders. The Working Draft is a basis for broad-based national and regional discussions during the development of the Pacific Plan – currently underway. Based on feedback during the consultation phase of the Plan, the final draft will be presented to Leaders at their Pacific Islands Forum meeting at the end of 2005. The Plan will form the basis of ongoing strengthening of regional cooperation and integration for the benefit of the people of the Pacific.

4. The Working Draft presents a strategic framework of key principles for strengthening regional cooperation and integration. Based on these principles and criteria, a range of regional cooperation priorities has been identified by the Task Force to be achieved as early practical, medium term and long term benefits¹. These activities have been further identified in the context of the four priority goals of Pacific Islands Forum countries – economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

5. As regional cooperation is a means of achieving national development objectives through the pooling of scarce resources, the national implementation of regional policies and programs and the willingness and capacity of countries to work together is of critical importance in the sharing of resources for common goals.

¹ Early practical benefits are *strategic or policy objectives, programs, projects or activities* that: (a) are achieved, completed or initiated within the first three years of the Pacific Plan; (b) meet the Guiding Principles and Criteria for Cooperation under the Pacific Plan and; (c) build or enhance confidence in and support for the Pacific Plan and for regionalism. Medium-term benefits are those that: (a) are achieved, completed or initiated within the first five years of the Pacific Plan; and (b) meet the Guiding Principles and Criteria for Cooperation under the Pacific Plan. Longer-term benefits are those that: (a) are achieved, completed or initiated within the first ten years of the Pacific Plan; and (b) meet the Guiding Principles and Criteria for Cooperation under the Pacific Plan.

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6. Also central to strengthening regional cooperation and integration is the building of partnerships with neighbours and beyond. This includes closer association between the Forum and non-sovereign Pacific island countries and territories; dynamic partnership with non-state actors (NSAs)²; maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of regional institutions; and robust engagement with development partners to better align programs with national priorities and processes.

7. To ensure that the goals and priorities of the Pacific Plan are achieved, it will include detailed implementation and monitoring and evaluation strategies, with realistic objectives and outputs and clearly defined coordination responsibilities. With a general timeframe of ten years, the Plan will ensure flexibility so that the goal of regional integration can develop. It will provide a mechanism as a 'springboard' for discussing and shaping the region's longer-term future.

Issues

Regionalism

8. While the region has already been moving in this cooperative direction in many ways, the new Leaders' Vision for the Plan represents a much stronger directive to move beyond the present boundaries.

9. Regionalism cannot be defined by cooperation alone – the largest benefits will be created by providing more regional services and closer regional integration.

10. This involves examining a 'new' form of Pacific regionalism along the lines of:

- *Regional cooperation* – dialogues and agreements (e.g. Forum Ministerial meetings, declaration, treaties, etc). This can be expensive (i.e. Pacific travel) but it allows for consensus-building and mutual coordination as an essential part of the 'Pacific Way'.
- *Regional provision of public services* – pooling of national services at the regional level (e.g. USP, FFA) to free national resources to invest in basic service delivery.
- *Regional integration* – lowering barriers for goods, services and people between countries (e.g. quarantine measures, import taxes, passport requirements, etc. through PICTA). This will mean stronger competitive pressures between countries but will also allow for economies of scale and more job opportunities,

11. Based on analysis to date, the type of regionalism which will best benefit the Pacific is that which addresses capacity constraints and lack of economic opportunities.

² These include Non-Government Organizations, Community Based Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations and Private Sector Associations, etc.

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Education and training

12. Education has strong linkages with all four of the areas identified by Leaders as the focus of the Forum and the Pacific Plan. An educated population is a prerequisite for economic growth, sustainable development and good governance
13. Despite diversity in the region in terms of access and quality of education, there are numerous commonalities. Many of these revolve around shortages of financial and human resources and the difficulty of catering adequately for all sectors and types of education. There are many concerns about the quality of education, its relevance to the needs of the Pacific in the 21st century and its role in preserving the languages and cultural values of Pacific people.
14. For decades, FICs have invested high proportions of their budgets on education. Donors have also given much assistance, notably for the tertiary sector - although in recent years there has been increasing emphasis on basic education.
15. Many FICs have already achieved the standards required of the second and third MDGs and these countries may have to develop indicators that deal with quality rather than access. The countries that have not yet reached these standards are making good progress.
16. Developing curricula that is relevant to the needs of the Pacific into the future is complex. Technical and vocational courses will go a long way to achieving people's aspirations. The opportunities offered by Information Communications Technology (ICT) could bring huge benefits to education in the Pacific, but there are numerous hurdles to cross in terms of having basic infrastructure in place first.
17. Regional cooperation in education has produced mixed results. Some initiatives have been very successful, while others have failed. Regional education programmes are not straightforward, as education tends to be nationally oriented. USP and SPBEA are excellent regional education initiatives. Projects such as BELS and those under the UNESCO have had mixed success. Much hope is vested in the PRIDE Project, which is implementing a substantial part of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) to improve the quality of education planning in the region. Strengthening collaborative mechanisms to further implement the FBEAP could provide a realistic strategy for deeper and broader regional cooperation in the education sector. Utilising networks of professional educators is another possible avenue for future collaboration.

Pacific Plan Working Draft

18. The Pacific Plan Working Draft contains specific recommendations for strengthening regional cooperation in the education sector. It is important to note that the Working Draft represents preliminary views only and is intended as a basis for broad-based discussion. **Therefore, Ministers of Education are urged to provide input to the**

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Pacific Plan to ensure that agreed education priorities for the region are reflected, noting that redrafting of the Plan and development of its implementation and resourcing strategies are currently underway for consideration by the Task Force and the Core Group of Leaders. Recommendations need to be based on specific outcomes-focused activities as Leaders have requested that the Pacific Plan focus on actions, not statements.

19. Current recommendations under the pillar of *economic growth* include action in the context of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP) and the Pacific Regional Initiative for Delivering Basic Education (PRIDE) to improve vocational training and linkages to the labour market and to economic growth. Initial practical suggestions include a regional maritime training school and the standardization of maritime training across the region.

20. In the medium term, establishment of specific vocational and training programs to help provide the region with necessary skills and capabilities in key labour market areas is recommended, particularly in nursing and health, hospitality and tourism and agriculture and forestry. A cost benefit analysis is currently underway on the establishment of a regional nursing school, similar to that established under CARICOM, and a regional tourism marketing plan is being developed.

21. Another development under TVET is ADB's recommendation to undertake a scoping study on skills development.

22. The suggestion for a regional pooling mechanism for the sharing of teachers has been raised. Fiji, for example, currently has a surplus of teachers while some other countries experience shortages.

23. Under the pillar of *sustainable development*, the Working Draft is currently recommending improved linkages between regional educational and training programs and those of national education institutions, in areas such as teacher training through accreditation and recognition of these programs at the regional level. Also recommended is establishment of standardised curricula in selected areas at the secondary level to help students to progress more easily to Form 7 programs; and a standardised examination system, including a regional school leaving certificate, to help students to progress more easily to vocational or higher education.

24. Leaders have also called for development of a regional Digital Strategy under the Pacific Plan. Work to date has examined the need for improved access, reduction in costs, better bandwidth to the global backbone, broadcasting, improved regulatory environments, and better human resources capacity in the region.

Engaging youth

25. As an effort to engage youth in development of the Pacific Plan and to canvass their views, they are being challenged to enter a Pacific-wide essay competition under the theme: *Benefits of Working Together Regionally*.

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26. An all-expense paid trip to Papua New Guinea to present the winning entry to the assembled Pacific Island Leaders will be the competition's main prize, along with prize money to be shared between the winning entrant and their school or institution.

27. The competition, co-sponsored by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the UNICEF Pacific regional office, was launched at the Pacific Youth MDGs Summit in Apia, Samoa from 9-12 May. The competition will close on 31st August 2005.

28. It is aimed at 16 to 24 year old entrants from Year 12 level to undergraduates (as well as young people not attached to any tertiary institutions), throughout Pacific islands' high schools and tertiary institutions. Limited to 1,000 to 1,500 words, the competition is open to all citizens of Pacific Island Countries, including non-sovereign states, regardless of residence. Judges for the competition will be drawn from the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific.

29. Education Ministries have been urged to promote the essay competition, particularly at secondary school level, where schools have been requested to short-list entries and submit a total of three essays per school.

30. Further information on the essay competition is available from national governments' Ministries of Education, national newspapers and from the Pacific Plan website at www.pacificplan.org.

Recommendation

31. Ministers may wish to consider:

- Noting the progress of the Pacific Plan as outlined in this paper.