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FORUM ECONOMIC OFFICIALS MEETING

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FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING

11 – 12 August 2020

Virtual

AGENDA ITEM 4(b): SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Purpose

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This paper presents a Concept Note (see [Annex 1](#)) for a coordinated region-wide approach to conducting a socio-economic impact assessment of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) in the Pacific.

Summary

The uncertainties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate the social and economic impacts across the Forum Members now and into the foreseeable future. Given these uncertainties, socio-economic impacts will become increasingly widespread, requiring urgent support and resources for immediate, medium and long-term recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic will pose challenges and limitations for Forum Members, and the ability to access timely and requisite data that will inform appropriate and effective policy responses at both national and regional levels.

This paper proposes a region-wide approach and analysis on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in the Pacific, which can be used to inform policy interventions that address wellbeing, and, that contributes to long-term recovery plans and strategies.

A. Problem/Opportunity Identification

The COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the global and regional landscape in 2020. For the Pacific, with relatively vulnerable public health systems, members moved quickly to close borders in order to avoid large scale community transmission, potential collapse of health systems and most importantly to avoid any fatalities due to COVID-19. The prompt action by Member countries curtailed the spread of the virus wherein the Pacific region has seen the fewest cases of COVID-19 compared to other regions (with 13 Forum Members reporting no cases). While the Pacific's geographical isolation from the rest of the world is often a disadvantage, it has served in our favour

in the case of this pandemic.

2. Notwithstanding the Pacific's relative success in preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19, the region continues to face a range of socio-economic challenges. These are a result of the virus itself in relation to social distancing measures and other public health measures that were put in place to mitigate its impact coupled with the exceptional response measures that were put in place (such as border closures, lockdown and curfews). These measures have had unintended consequences resulting in business closures, increased unemployment and social issues such as increasing rates of domestic violence.

3. The uncertainties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate the social and economic impacts across Forum Membership now and into the foreseeable future. Given these uncertainties, socio-economic impacts will become increasingly wide-spread, requiring urgent support and resources for immediate, medium and long-term recovery.

4. This provides an opportunity for the conduct of a regional socio-economic impact assessment COVID-19 in order to provide Members timely and high-quality policy advice on addressing the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 nationally as well as regionally.

B. Background

5. The Secretariat has conducted an economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in and on the region and its effect on the economies of Forum Member countries.

6. Whilst the economic impact report provides the realities of COVID-19 impacts on the region's resources and revenue, these need to be assessed alongside the social impacts of the pandemic on Pacific communities and households across the Blue Pacific continent. Emerging issues are evident amongst women, youth, children, persons living with disabilities and anticipated increase of behavioural changes, risky behaviour amongst the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups caused by COVID-19. These emerging issues include:

- i. Violence against children is an endemic problem across the region, with abuse occurring at the home and community levels, in schools, in religious institutions and in or near industrial areas and large resource and infrastructure projects;¹
- ii. With the current health crisis an increase in gender-based violence (and its severity and frequency) due to confinement is likely to be observed across countries, with resource constraints reducing the protection and support available, contributing to a heightened perception of impunity among perpetrators;²
- iii. Exposure to increased risk of gender-based violence for adolescent girls are also evident as social protection structures breakdown;³

¹ <https://www.plan.org.au/learn/who-we-are/blog/2019/08/27/-/media/plan/documents/reports/unseenunsafe-main-report-embargoed-final.pdf?la=en&hash=61ED93143FD4010890714A3C0677F27F159FBDF&hash=61ED93143FD4010890714A3C0677F27F159FBDF>

²World Bank Policy Note, April 2020

³ The COVID-19 Outbreak Protection Brief

iv. Young people have voiced their need for psychosocial support on coping with the impacts of COVID 19. The Pacific Youth Council has actively mobilized support for regional youth dialogue for self-care strategies on how to manage and cope with the stresses COVID-19 on their education plans and limited opportunities;⁴and,

v. Persons with disabilities are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to barriers accessing preventive information and hygiene, and reliance on physical contact with the environment or support persons.⁵

7. These realities require our Leaders to view and understand the holistic impact caused by this global crisis and the need for a multisectoral approach to recovery plans and response strategies.

8. To support governments with the COVID-19 pandemic and maintaining the commitment to the 2030 Agenda, the UN Development System (UNDS) has developed a global framework which provides guidance for immediate socio-economic response to the impacts of this crisis. The support referenced in the framework describes assessments, program design, advocacy and policy advice. The five pillars of the UNDS response include health first; protecting people; economic response and recovery; macroeconomic responses and multilateral collaboration, social cohesion and community resilience.⁶

9. For the Pacific region, the existing constraints on budget allocation and resources which have resulted in vulnerable health systems and social services, make our Members less risk resilient and more exposed, with heightened inequalities and social exclusion. The economic and social disruptions leave Members less likely to progress the 2030 Agenda against target indicators and timeframes – at both national and regional levels.

⁴ PYC, Coping with stress during a time of uncertainty, April 2020

⁵ <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/world-report-on-disability>

⁶A UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19

10. The global crisis and health emergency has called for the Pacific to respond collectively, as a region, recognising the unique vulnerabilities and challenges due to isolation and geographical spread across the Pacific Ocean. With the support of Forum Foreign Ministers, a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19 (PHP-C) was established providing the enabling environment for a coordinated response for immediate medical and humanitarian needs of Member countries.

11. To strategically and effectively respond to the crisis as a region, a socio-economic impact assessment will be actioned by CROP agencies to identify the severity of the impact across all aspects of our development and well-being. The collaborative approach to this response effort will inform and provide Member countries policy options and proposed reforms for medium and long-term recovery efforts post the COVID-19 pandemic, and also inform the development of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.

C. Analysis of Policy Options

12. Given the current context, it is noted that some Members will be challenged in conducting national assessments on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 as the basis for an evidenced base for response and recovery efforts in the immediate, medium and long term. This capacity will be exacerbated by challenges to access data and information required for the conduct of the assessment.

13. The proposed coordinated and collaborative region-wide approach to develop a socio-economic impacts assessment of COVID-19 for the Pacific will ensure that Members have a timely and fit for purpose product as the basis to develop their national policy settings for response and recovery. This would also provide an evidence base for national and regional engagement, advocacy, and cooperation within Forum Members, Forum Dialogue Partners and International Agencies on the necessary assistance required for Members response and recovery, reflective of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

14. Therefore, ensuring a coordinated, strategic and collaborative effort on carrying out of the impact assessment is the viable policy option which will avoid duplication and overlapping efforts for Member Countries. It will provide a single source of trusted data, that could be used to inform policy decisions at the national level as member states develop their medium and longer-term recovery strategies from COVID-19 and sustainable development strategies and plans, more broadly.

D. Consultation

15. The attached concept note was prepared and agreed to by PIFS and SPC. Further consultations has been held with all CROP agencies.

16. A Terms of Reference of the Taskforce has been developed to guide the approach and stakeholder consultations of this report.

17. The proposed approach of the response effort has been shared with CSO's at their annual CSO Forum, which provided the platform or CSO engagement on the COVID-19 response.

E. Next Steps

18. The Secretariat and SPC, in collaboration the CROP agencies will undertake the following:
- Develop a work plan and conduct a comprehensive region-wide socio-economic impact assessment in consultation with Member countries to analyse and compile data and information on the impacts of COVID-19 through macro and national level statistical systems and reporting.
 - Provide a regional report on the socio-economic impact assessment with proposed policy options for endorsement by Forum Economic Ministers. The report will also identify opportunities for resourcing and financing partnerships to support the region's recovery plan across all sectors.

Pacific Island Forum Secretariat
30 July 2020

CONCEPT NOTE

COVID-19: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS, RECOVERY AND OPPORTUNITIES

Purpose

This Concept Note outlines a region wide approach to providing Pacific island countries with an update on the socio-economic impacts of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Process & Objectives:

2. In this context, PIFS and SPC in collaboration with the CROP agencies, will present through Forum Economic Ministers to Leaders, an update on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, outlining approaches on improving wellbeing based broadly on:
 - i. building an **understanding** of the social dimensions of COVID-19 and it's impacts in the Pacific,
 - ii. addressing **vulnerability, inequality and social exclusion** in the region,
 - iii. building **resilience** to external shocks, that takes into account the diverse cultural contexts and needs of population groups across the region,
 - iv. strengthening regional cross-sectoral **coordination** through dialogue and collaboration to achieve sustainable development.

Problem/Opportunity Identification

Background

3. In December of 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19 in China escalated to become a global health and economic crisis. The crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities and social development challenges already faced by the region.⁷

4. The pandemic has intensified at an alarming rate with over to 14 million cases and close to 600,000 deaths across 216 countries and territories affected.⁸ This pandemic is not just a health issue, it is a crisis that strikes the core of all communities and impacts entire populations in varying degrees.

5. Given our region's experiences, coupled with our relatively weak health systems, Members moved quickly to close borders in order to avoid large scale community transmission, potential collapse of health systems, and most importantly to avoid any fatalities due to COVID-19.

⁷ First Quadrennial Sustainable Development Report 2018

⁸ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>, July 2020

6. While the Pacific's geographical isolation from the rest of the world is often a disadvantage, it has served in our favour in the case of this pandemic. The Pacific region has seen the fewest cases of COVID-19 compared to other regions of the world with at least 13 of our member countries reporting no cases. This appears to highlight the success of the prompt and exceptional precautionary measures most Pacific nations have in place, to curtail the introduction and spread of the virus.

7. Although a public health crisis appears to have been avoided in the Pacific, the restrictions imposed by countries and territories by way of border closures, inter-island travel restrictions, curfews and social isolation has impacted social safety nets and structures. These include social gatherings for special occasions, funerals and being with loved ones. Such measures have led to significant limitations to people's access to support mechanisms, the extended family, communal support systems for the vulnerable such as the elderly.

8. With limited social protection options and economic opportunities, Members are also extremely vulnerable to natural disasters. This is evident in the face of this pandemic with four Pacific countries (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga) having to respond to both to COVID-19 and TC Harold. While shorter term recovery from the pandemic is likely, medium- and longer-term impacts from climate change and disasters will likely get worse.

9. Food security challenges, sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing, unless appropriately addressed, will be an enduring issue. For Vanuatu, with a total population of 92,274 and 30,996 households from 345 communities from the three affected Vanuatu provinces of Sanma, Penama and Malampa were affected by TC Harold.⁹ Solomon Islands Government allocated SBD\$8.7 million(US\$1 million) for food relief efforts caused by the tropical cyclone Harold amid COVID-19 response.¹⁰ In Tongatapu and Eua , Tonga, a total of over 900 households were impacted, and damages to homes, toilets and water storage.¹¹ For Fiji, 107,000 families who were severely affected by Tropical Cyclone Harold have been assisted by the government.¹²

10. For countries that are not tourism reliant and depend on other resources such as fisheries, specifically countries of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), the projected reduction in fisheries revenue and receipts, will result in a sizeable fiscal shock. An example seen with the Republic of Marshall Islands, reports that the RMI government is projected to decline from \$30 million in FY2020 to \$26 million in FY2021of fishing fee revenue.¹³

Economic impacts

11. The economic cost from COVID-19 is unprecedented. Global economic activity has contracted sharply for major trading partners of our Members which will affect forecasts for the region.¹⁴ As presented in the findings of the Secretariat's Economic Impact Assessment report, Members are confronted with direct impacts to GDP, with significant reductions in public revenue, business closures, halts in tourism and industry, and limited supplies with travel and border restrictions in place.¹⁵

⁹ Port Vila, 04 MAY 2020 (VANUATU DAILY POST)

¹⁰ PACNEWS 2: Mon 04 May 2020

¹¹ Tonga SiteRep#3, April, 2020

¹²<https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Severe-Tropical-Cyclone-Harold-48rf5x/>

¹³EconMAP Technical Note, May 8, 2020

¹⁴ IMF monitor, April 2020

¹⁵ An Overview of the Probable Impacts of COVID19 on Forum Island Countries, June 2020

12. Tourism may never return to pre-COVID-19 levels, with some countries in our region expecting a slow recovery.¹⁶ Aviation services will be slow to recover and unemployment levels are forecasted to rise for Members to previously unforeseen heights.

13. The Pacific Region, with an average of 10-12% shares in employment in tourism are particularly vulnerable, with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) forecasting industry job losses of at least 15.3 million.¹⁷ ILO also estimates that in Asia and the Pacific, the total working-hour loss for the second quarter of 2020 will be at 13.5%, or 235 million jobs, up from the previous estimate of 10%.¹⁸

14. The impact is already felt in some Pacific countries. In Vanuatu 70% of tourism jobs have been lost in approximately six weeks. Tourism has traditionally provided approx. 40% of Vanuatu national GDP.¹⁹ A workplace survey by the Ministry of Employment Fiji and the ILO shows that close to 115, 000 Fijian workers have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁰

15. Impact is also escalating to the private sector with closure of businesses, for Fiji as an example, 66 across 13 municipal councils have closed in Fiji with more anticipated.²¹

16. Remittance inflows are a key source of foreign exchange earnings for some countries in the region. However, rapidly weakening labor market conditions in the major remittance sending countries (namely, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and USA), will most likely affect the flow of remittances. ADB assesses Fiji, Vanuatu, Palau and Cook Islands to be the ‘worst-hit’ economies in Asia-Pacific.²²

17. The impact on public finances are projected to be massive, requiring Governments and regions to respond swiftly with appropriate fiscal policies and tools, increasing pressures on economies that are already struggling. Governments must also be ready to have a transparent and accountable mechanism in place to receive and report all development assistance related to the pandemic. With new cyclone seasons in the Pacific, additional socio-economic impacts and relief responses will be further hampered by the already limited fiscal capacity of governments.

Social impacts

18. COVID-19 further exacerbates inequality and social exclusion. It is likely to disproportionately affect vulnerable groups particularly women and girls, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities,²³ and adversely impacts access to basic services, food security, livelihoods, psychosocial support, safety and protection.²⁴

¹⁶ FIJI - TOURISM: FBC May, 2020- Tourism in Fiji will probably get back to 70 percent in the near future

¹⁷ SPTO COVID Recovery Strategy, May 2020

¹⁸https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf

¹⁹ Joint Survey on COVID-19 and TC Harold impacts on tourism

industry https://images.impartmedia.com/vanuatu.travel/documents/National_Tourism_Business_Impacts_Survey_TCHarold_Covid-19.pdf.

²⁰ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Initial-numbers-show-115000-workers-affected-by-COVID-19--ILO-x5r8f4/>

²¹ www.fijilive.com

²² <https://www.austrade.gov.au/news/covid-19/updates/nz-and-pacific>

²³ PACIFIC DISABILITY FORUM COVID19 UPDATE, 25 March 2020, SITUATIONAL, ANALYSIS Ref No. COVID-19_PDF_01

²⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/TC%20Harold%20Rapid%20Gender%20Analysis%2014.04.20.pdf>

19. There is also the need return to basic living, relative to traditional knowledge and social practices on slow food production and food preservation, and acknowledging how COVID has brought to the fore, the importance of reviving these practices in the Pacific.

20. This demonstrates ways of identifying essential survival and coping strategies for similar such situations. This also provides the opportunity to recognise the positive impact but will require some consultation on how these will be addressed and appropriately allocated the required resources to further development these areas.

21. Some major social challenges which are also major social impacts of COVID are further provided below:

Health

22. We recognize Pacific countries have vulnerable health care systems and infrastructure that struggle to cope with ongoing health challenges such as non-communicable diseases (NCDs), let alone the further burden of pandemics such as COVID-19.

23. The Pacific has the world's highest levels of Type 2 diabetes and is home to eight out of the 10 most obese countries.²⁵ Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases, represent the single largest cause of premature mortality in the Pacific.²⁶ These NCD comorbidities may intensify COVID-19 crisis and will significantly impact health, economic, and social development across the Pacific unless urgent action is taken.²⁷

24. Members capacity and lack of laboratory equipment to analyse tests on site creates more challenges to case identification for COVID-19 cases, leaving our countries more vulnerable to widespread infections.²⁸

Children and youth

25. There is likelihood of an increase in child protection issues as a result of COVID-19. Children are more at risk of neglect or lack of parental care, either because a caregiver has passed away, fallen ill, been quarantined or hospitalized. In the Pacific Islands, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are working with governments and partners to stop transmission and keep children and their families safe.²⁹

26. Children facing acute deprivation in nutrition, protection or stimulation, or periods of prolonged exposure to toxic stress, during the critical window of early childhood development are likely to develop lifelong challenges as their neurological development is impaired³⁰.

²⁵ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/many-pacific-islands-are-untouched-by-covid-19-its-arrival-could-be-disastrous>, May 2020

²⁶ WHO, Addressing Non-Communicable Diseases in the Pacific

²⁷ HAWAII JOURNAL OF HEALTH & SOCIAL WELFARE, MAY 2020, VOL 79, NO 5 COVID-19 Special Column: The Crisis of Non-Communicable Diseases in the Pacific and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic, April 2020

²⁸ HAWAII JOURNAL OF HEALTH & SOCIAL WELFARE, MAY 20, VOL 79, NO 5 COVID-19 Special Column: The Crisis of Non-Communicable Diseases in the Pacific and the Coronavirus Disease, April 2020

²⁹ <https://news.un.org/en/audio/2020/04/1060792>- Interview Sheldon Yett, April 2020

³⁰ https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf

27. Youth Unemployment with a regional average of 23% compared to the global average of 12-13% and related to youth employment is the whole area of labour mobility and the associated social impacts.

Education

28. The Pacific region has approximately 800,000³¹ children enrolled in schools and early childhood education centres. As part of the preparedness and response for COVID-19, most Pacific countries announced school closures, some with shifted term breaks and others extended or indefinite breaks.

29. There is a high risk of adverse impacts on children's learning and well-being, as well as long-term educational outcomes, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

30. The impact of COVID-19 impact on the education system for Members are likely to be more devastating in countries with already low learning outcomes, and high dropout rates. Prolonged closures tend to have a disproportionately negative impact on the most vulnerable students.³²

31. It is most likely that many students will leave schooling and become concentrated in disadvantaged groups. Learning will suffer even more due to economic pressures at home where households will be less able to pay for educational supplies such as books. Fiscal pressures could lead to a drop-in education investment, reducing resources available to teachers.³³

Protection

32. Evidence emerging globally, and regionally indicates an increase in domestic violence, child, emotional and sexual abuse as a result of movement restrictions and self-isolation measures. Women and children are confined with their perpetrators placing them at more risk of violence and abuse.³⁴

33. The Pacific already has one of the highest prevalence rates of gender-based violence globally, COVID-19 exacerbates this social challenge. Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive manifestations of gender inequality. Prevalence studies conducted in Pacific Island Countries (PICs), using the World Health Organization methodology, show much higher prevalence rates of GBV with 60%-80% of women and girls who have faced intimate or non-intimate partner violence in their lifetime.³⁵

34. In addition, some services to support survivors of domestic, intimate partner and gender-based violence, including shelters have had to either close or significantly reduce services as a result of COVID-19, limiting the options for those at risk. Community helplines/hotlines in some Pacific countries³⁶ have seen an increase in distress calls particularly for food rations with more people losing their jobs.

Gender

³¹ UNESCO Pacific Office

³² <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/educational-challenges-and-opportunities-covid-19-pandemic>

³³ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33696/148198.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

³⁴ Care Australia Rapid Gender Analysis on COVID19 in the Pacific – dated 26 March 2020.

³⁵ <https://icaad.ngo/accountability-gender-based-violence/>

³⁶As reported through the COVID19 regional Pacific Protection and Humanitarian Cluster.

35. Emerging evidence with Members on the impact of COVID-19, suggests that women's economic and productive lives will be affected disproportionately and differently from men. Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. They have less access to social protection and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men.³⁷

36. Women are key health care frontline responders placing them at increased risk and exposure to infection. This comes with variation to access if clean water for sanitation and limited personal protective equipment.³⁸ Maternal and sexual reproductive health needs continue in an emergency but risk being de-prioritised. Reports also confirm that the Pacific has some of the highest prevalence rates with 2 in 3 women experiencing violence in their lifetime.³⁹

37. With COVID-19 posing additional stresses on hygiene practice, lack of mobility due to self-isolation and quarantine as well as the reduction in income, women and girls' ability to access menstrual hygiene management materials is likely to be affected.⁴⁰ Additionally in the Pacific, women consistently raise significant difficulties with access to sanitation and highlight experiences of violence whilst accessing sanitation facilities. COVID-19 makes access even more difficult.

38. There are gross imbalances in the gender distribution of unpaid care work. According to the UN⁴¹, women were doing three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men before COVID-19. This unseen economy has real impacts on the formal economy, and women's lives.

39. In the context of the pandemic, the increased demand for care work is deepening already existing inequalities in the gender division of labor. Women are primary care givers in the family and expected to care for the elderly, sick and children as schools close. The less visible parts of the care economy are coming under increasing strain but remain unaccounted for in the economic response.⁴²

Disability

40. An estimated 15% of people in the Pacific have some form of disability. Persons with disabilities are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to barriers accessing preventive information and hygiene, and reliance on physical contact with the environment or support persons.⁴³ Despite being part of the high-risk group, persons with disabilities are usually inadvertently left out of community preparedness and health messaging efforts, due to inaccessible communication and other accessibility barriers.

41. Children with disabilities and those with high support requirements are facing significant disruption in their usual support system. Containment measures, such as social distancing and self-isolation, is not possible for those who rely on the support of others or may result in disruptions in services vital for many persons with disabilities. These factors undermine basic rights such as food, health care, sanitation, and communication and possibly lead to abandonment, further isolation and institutionalization.

³⁷ UN Policy Brief: The impact of COVID-19 on Women (April 2020)

³⁸CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region 26 March 2020

³⁹CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region 26 March 2020

⁴⁰ CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region 26 March 2020

⁴¹UN Policy Brief: The impact of COVID-19 on Women (April 2020)

⁴² UN Policy Brief: The impact of COVID-19 on Women (April 2020)

⁴³ <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/world-report-on-disability>

Climate Change and Disaster Risks

42. We recognise that the Pacific region is at the forefront of impacts from climate change and extreme new weather patterns of increase intensity and frequency. The Pacific region recognises that addressing these issues is not just an environmental issue, but a key development issue. It is important to reiterate that climate change remains the biggest threat to the region, and as such, considering the ongoing climate and disaster risks and how to plan better for a more holistic response to multiple cross-cutting crises is imperative.⁴⁴

43. Interconnectedness of the pandemic and climate change; while countries will recover from the pandemic, climate change will continue to impact the region for a while. Therefore, a coordinated and integrated approach to planning and policy formulation is warranted.

Approach

44. The onset of COVID-19 and the region's continuing vulnerability to climate change, disaster risks and extreme weather events heightens the necessity for the region to strengthen and implement holistic and risk-informed policies and programmes. It further illustrates the need for strengthening cross-sectoral, multi-agency coordination to ensure that response and recovery actions are targeted and focused on building resilient communities and institutions at all levels. The global health crisis provides an avenue for the region to build back better moving forward.

45. The region is committed to progress implementation of the sustainable development goals and remains focused to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. COVID-19 provides an opportunity for the Pacific to take stock, adjust and be better prepared for the next global crisis. It is an opportunity to ensure regional strategies and plans such as the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, proposed *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP)* are adaptive and responsive to existing and emerging global and regional crises.

46. A region-wide approach, is proposed to take into account regional responses and actions currently in place, such as the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C), the key regional cooperative response mechanism which has been established to facilitate the response and recovery efforts for the COVID-19 pandemic.

47. The Secretariat has completed an economic impact analysis of COVID-19 in the Pacific. This work provides the basis for the analysis of the resulting social impacts in the Pacific

48. The Secretariat in collaboration with the Pacific Community propose the following:

- i. The CROP Taskforce will guide the design and delivery of the region-wide assessment. The Taskforce will provide updates the CROP Heads; and report to Forum Member countries with a report on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in the region.
- ii. Review existing and available response plans and reports on COVID-19 and any learnings that will address the social and economic impacts and inform medium-long-term policy

⁴⁴ <https://www.forumsec.org/covid-19-and-climate-change-we-must-rise-to-both-crises>

interventions for our Members. These also include reports and frameworks shared by the UN system, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and regional organisations.

- iii. Work closely with the Pacific Sustainable Development Working Group (PSDWG) to review of the biennial report and progress update of the Sustainable Development Goals for the region, and impact on indicators and targets due to COVID-19.
- iv. In collaboration with CROP agencies, identify existing and relevant indicators (from SDGs and other existing sources) to inform prioritised interventions.
- v. Secretariat will work closely with CROP agencies to facilitate stakeholder consultations for the reviews of on-going assessments and available reports in consultation with Member countries for medium and long-term recovery plans and policy interventions with required resourcing.

Next Steps:

49. The Secretariat in collaboration and consultation with the Pacific Community (and other CROP agencies once further consulted) and partners will:

- Develop a work plan and conduct a region-wide socio-economic impact assessment in consultation with Member countries to analyse and compile data and information on the impacts of COVID-19 through macro and national level statistical systems and reporting.
- Provide a regional report on the socio-economic impact assessment with proposed policy options mechanism for endorsement by the Forum Economic Ministers, and identify opportunities for resourcing and financing partnerships to support the region's recovery plan across all sectors.