**Feedback from Unicef PNG office on Australia’s new International Development Policy**

To complement the feedback provided during the partners’ consultation, below are some key areas we believe should be taken into consideration for Australia engagement in the Pacific for the next 5 – 10 years. It is critical to keep in mind throughout this process that PNG represents approximately 85% of the Pacific population, excluding Australia and New Zealand, and as such should continue to be given special attention*.*

**Climate Change:**

The climate crisis is a children’s crisis: It is affecting their survival, wellbeing, learning opportunities, safety, and stability. Every child on earth is affected by at least one climate or environmental hazard. One billion children globally are at extremely high risk of climate change - they face a combination of exposure to extreme hazards, such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves, and are least-equipped to deal with the impacts due to a lack of access to key services. The Pacific region is specially impacted by the effects of climate change.

Climate Change is already impacting daily lives of people in the region, especially in the rural areas where most schools, health centres and households depend on rainwater collection. Australia could focus on:

* Supporting sustainable/cost effective technological options for drinking water in the Pacific as droughts become prolonged and existing water sources are not able to meet the demand during dry seasons.
* Prioritizing support to the establishing and strengthening of supply chains for providing these solutions in remote areas.
* Supporting sustainable climate friendly social infrastructures, including health facilities, schools, etc.
* Advocating and supporting efforts to address negative impacts of climate change, prioritising climate risk assessments and climate resilient solutions.

**Digital Transformation:**

Thedigital revolution is shaping children’s lives in profound ways. Children and young people are early adopters and frequent users of the internet for communication, play, schoolwork, access to information and expression. At the same time, the digital world increasingly tracks and shapes children’s and young people’s choices and actions, potentially limiting their development. How can we maximize children’s well-being through the positive use of digital technologies while mitigating the risks of harm?

Amidst the digital transformation of public and private spaces, child and adolescent participation looks considerably different today. Online, adolescents have more access to networked social movements through decentralized digital communication and messaging. Young people can also mobilize for issue-oriented activism quickly and effectively through digital social platforms. Digital tools may therefore provide a new *‘ladder of citizen participation’* for young people, which is critical to address the issues related with violent conflict in the context of countries like PNG.

Australia could further support countries in the Pacific region to fast-track the digital transformation in the Education Sector, availing remote learning and training for students, teachers, and other education personnel to continue the delivery of quality education and skills development that are aligned with the 21st century’s global demands. Use of appropriate technology may help the countries in the region to leapfrog in the education sector.

**Growing humanitarian crises:**

The question about the next humanitarian crisis is not IF but WHEN. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, East Asia and Pacific has seen an increase in poverty for the first time in 30 years, negatively impacting children’s health, learning, protection, and wellbeing. Australia new development policy should make provisions to bring children of the region back on track, reducing poverty, addressing education, and the welfare of children.

Even though PNG experienced fewer lockdowns compared to the neighboring countries in South-East Asia, the effect of the pandemic are seen in children’s learning outcomes, mental health and psychosocial well-being. Together with the global community, Australia should support urgent actions to ensure learning recovery and learners’ safety and well-being in the pacific, especially PNG which is a disaster-prone country, whether natural or man-made, and its education system needs to be resilient to future shocks so that their effects could be minimized.

Addressing the learning crisis requires ensuring that every student gains a solid foundation in basic reading and mathematics. In other words, it’s urgent to invest in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) for every child. These skills are the foundation for all learning throughout childhood and beyond. Without these basic skills, students are not prepared to transition to secondary education and, ultimately, to the workplace.

Yet, in many countries in the Pacific region, there is a lack of public demand for, and political commitment to, FLN. This is partly driven by a lack of quality evidence and data on early grade learning, compared to secondary or tertiary education. This lack of data is also hampering our ability to track which countries are progressing or falling behind on FLN. There is a need to prioritize FLN within the aid architecture for the pacific region.

Humanitarian crises often severely impact the nutritional status of children. Stunting has long-term consequences for children’s survival and development because of its effects on brain development and learning performance. Despite the high magnitude of the problem, the prioritisation and investment in nutrition by bilateral partners has been very limited in the region. In the context of PNG, Australia’s investment in nutrition will be essential in supporting both nutrition service delivery, and nutrition sensitive actions.

Protection of children’s rights in the Pacific’s changing climate and incorporation of the principle of the best interests of the child throughout disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change actions requires attention. The crisis may lead to a disruption to child protection systems in many ways, which makes children, susceptible to exploitation, abuse, and physical harm. There is a need to support the child protection system strengthening wholistically identifying a phased approach.

The immunization programmes in many Pacific countries suffers from frequent stock out of vaccines due to inadequate allocation and delayed fund release for timely procurement. In PNG, Large number of health facilities remains non-functional or closed due to lack of infrastructure & inadequate human resources to manage these facilities.

Key interventions to be supported by Australia in the region, could include catching up “zero dose children” to guard against vaccine-preventable diseases, integrating COVID-19 vaccine and routine immunization delivery as/where possible, improving demand generation and community engagement to increase uptake, and very importantly strengthening countries capacity to respond to epidemics as part of global health security against emerging diseases.

**Demography (young population):**

Many countries in the region have a youthful population which has implication on increased demand for social services and infrastructure. Urban migration is leading to increased informal settlements in growing cities and towns and well as increased movement of refugees looking for better economic opportunities.

Australia’s advocacy and support to governments can help them avoid the current demographic trend from becoming a burden, a source of more conflict and instability. The demographic shift with younger population is also creating education and skills crisis which requires a comprehensive approach. Attention needs to be paid to create opportunities for young people for skilling, working and creating a social impact. Multidimensional and long-term funding tackling challenging issues, such as a social protection programme for adolescent development, may help in this area. Australia should strive to create more space for effective engagement and participation by children and young people as active stakeholders.

**Data/information gaps:**

Many countries in Pacific have weak data systems. There is a need to systematically invest in building the national capacities by strengthening the routine monitoring systems in social sectors to generate data for monitoring the progress of programmes as well as come up with innovative solutions to meet the short term needs for guiding the programming. Simple solutions, such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, would provide reliable evidence for nominal costs and help determine the changes for children.

In medium to long term, these investments should aim at creating a culture of evidence use in decision making at various levels of Government by strengthening the data/information management systems.

**Aid Architecture:**

It is important to optimize the aid architecture in the context of the Pacific Island Nations through improved use of the strengths of various stakeholders (Government, private sector, UN, INGOs, Research Institutions, civil society, etc.) by ensuring complementarity in the roles played by different stakeholders in a sector. The focus should be on leveraging the strengths of each stakeholder depending upon their comparative advantage to achieve long term sustainable gains. This approach may allow to strengthen the system of “checks and balances” that ensures transparency and encourages accountability for each stakeholder.

Such an approach will require a commitment to a long-term sector vision(s) with prioritization of investments in areas like social infrastructure, social sector workforce, and an approach of “institution building” at various levels of Government. There may be a need to look at different funding modalities like – incentive-based funding, long term flexible funding, etc. and to channelize the funding to critical but often ignored cross-sectoral thematic areas, like- social and behavior change communication, data and evidence, resilience building, etc.

Innovative approaches for channeling non-ODA resources could be further strengthened to help countries in the region generate resources in the chronically underfunded areas, like guiding the Australian private sector companies operating in the region to follow a CSR policy that complements and supplements the efforts being made through the ODA. Further reinforcing the focus on the “win-win” situation for both the private sector and the country governments could be the way forward in this area.