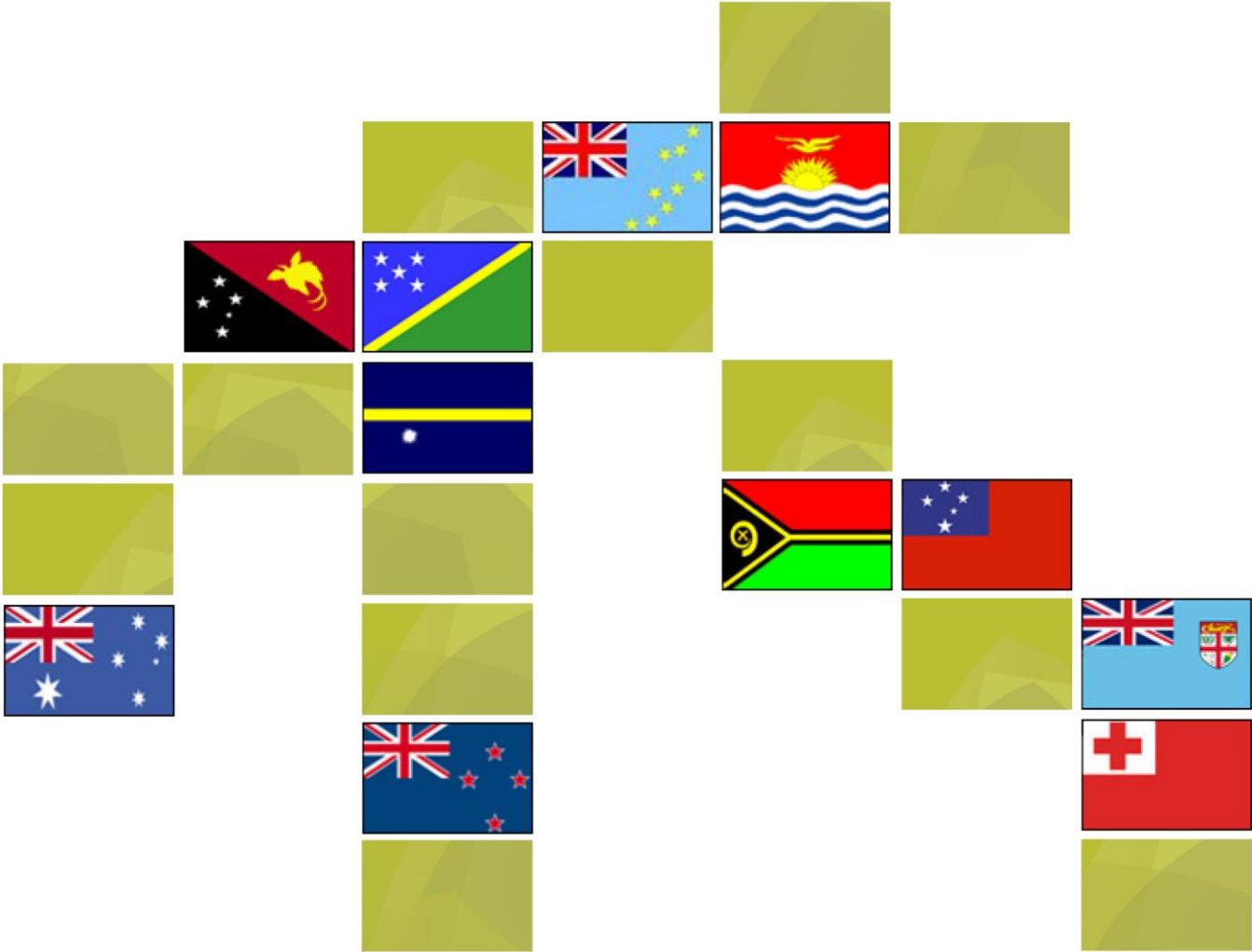


REPORT OF THE REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS MEETING - PACIFIC

May 26 2020 | Online Meeting



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



Regional Focal Points Meeting – Pacific May 26 2020 (Vancouver)/May 27 2020 (Pacific Region)

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Overview

Originally, COL planned to hold the Pacific Focal Points Meeting in Auckland, New Zealand on April 28 and 29. However, as the world shut down, with small Pacific nations being some of the first to close their borders, COL decided to cancel the meeting. Instead, they opted to host an online meeting using the online platform, Zoom.

The meeting had two aims:

1. Review and report on the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) work in the Pacific; and
2. Identify and discuss regional and national priorities.

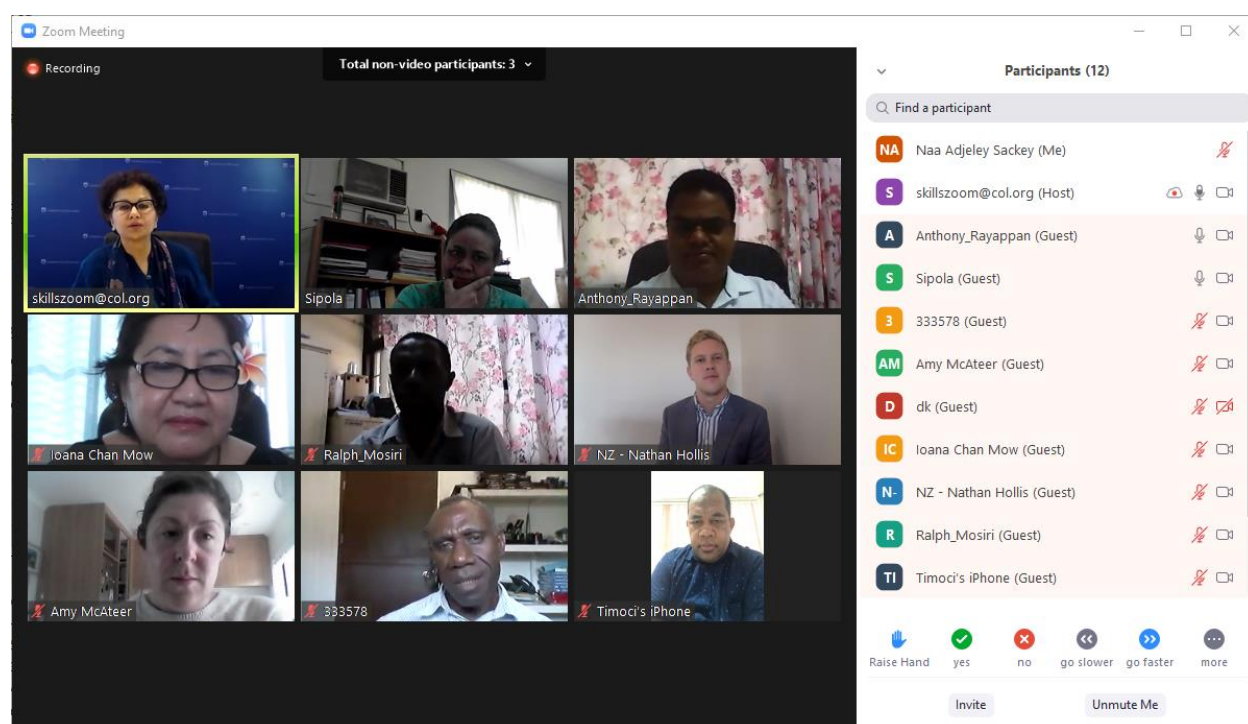
Expected outcomes from the meeting were:

1. Regional priorities and trends to help guide the development of COL's Strategic Plan 2021-2027 identified; and
2. For each member state, 3-5 key national priorities identified to inform COL's Strategic Plan.

A schedule for the meeting is available at Annex 1.

Representatives from seven out of the 11 Commonwealth countries in the Pacific attended i.e. Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu. Annex 2 gives the list of participants.

Prior to the meeting, COL invited Focal Points to submit a country report and complete a survey. Annex 3 summarises contributions from these two consultative processes.



Pacific Focal Points and COL's President meet online

Proceedings of the Meeting – COL Pacific Focal Points Meeting

Session 1: Presentation by COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar

The COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, welcomed attendees from the Pacific region. She commented that COL had facilitated a face-to-face meeting for Caribbean Focal Points and an online meeting for African and European Focal Points. Professor Kanwar noted COL's commitment to connect with Focal Points despite the disruption caused by COVID-19.

Professor Kanwar began her presentation with COL's purpose, history and work done through the Education and Skill sectors, along with regional centres and Gender as a cross-cutting focus. This introduction explained the role of Focal Points as connections between COL and the member countries, and the importance of Focal Points meetings for COL to share its achievements and understand countries' needs and priorities.



Professor Kanwar outlined COL's five paradigm shifts:

1. "If the child cannot go to school, the school comes to the child" which is largely achieved through the Open Schooling initiative.
2. "Technology-enabled learning can break open the ivory towers of tertiary education" which is done by promoting open universities and distance learning institutions
3. "Open educational resources (OER) are the answer to closed and costly textbooks"
4. "The digital divide can be transformed into a digital dividend" by using technologies such as COL's Aptus innovation and community radio
5. "Literacy is not always a precondition for learning".

Professor Kanwar pointed out that inputs from current global trends, contributions from key stakeholders such as COL's Board of Governors, partners and stakeholders, feedback from Focal Points and the five-year evaluation currently in progress will all feed into COL's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2027. She highlighted the new strategic plan will continue to focus on Goal 4 of United Nation's The 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

Having emphasised the significant changes caused by the COVID-19 crisis, Professor Kanwar noted the 574 million students across the Commonwealth affected by school closures, with online learning as the immediate response. She also pointed out that only 33% of the Pacific population could access the internet and only 77% have access to mobile subscriptions, which makes total reliance on online learning unfeasible. Other factors, such as connectivity, electricity, access to e-learning platforms, quality of digital content and uneven teacher capacity, also make online learning difficult. She shared examples of varied responses to the educational challenges due to COVID-19 across the Pacific. Australia has discounted courses, deferred tuition payments for students, and shared a bank of skills courses focused on increasing employability. Fiji has started broadcasting educational TV programmes, Kiribati and Samoa have made online resources available for students, New Zealand has distributed electronic devices to many students, and Solomon Islands has started radio-based education programmes.

Regarding COL's response to COVID-19, Professor Kanwar listed various activities. Recognising the extra vulnerability of women and girls, COL initiated the CommonwealthWiseWomen mentorship programme. COL has also established an international partnership of distance and online learning for COVID-19, through which intergovernmental organisations, such as UNESCO and the World Bank, and universities can share their resources and expertise. COL has also partnered with Coursera for a workforce recovery programme which has shared 10,000 free licences with Focal Points and partners to access the skills courses available. COL has also developed "Guidelines on Distance Education during COVID-19" and worked with Dr Tony Bates to develop a 12-video series on online learning for policy makers and practitioners. In the Pacific, a MOOC for teachers is in progress with 1,329 learners (655 women) mainly from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu.

Professor Kanwar pointed out that once the immediate response phase is over, the existing learning crisis is expected to worsen. The school dropout rate is predicted to increase, the digital divide will widen, and youth employment will worsen.

She also outlined the main focus areas highlighted during the two previous Focal Points Meetings. The Caribbean Region Focal Points meeting held in January 2020 in St Lucia focused on integrating ICTs in education, building teacher capacity, developing OER, addressing boys' underperformance, local agriculture, and skilling and reskilling. However, the African Region in April 2020 focused on mitigating the effects of COVID-19 through distance education, re-skilling to deal with unemployment and ICT infrastructure improvements and climate change issues.

To close her presentation, Professor Kanwar suggested three questions for the reflection and discussion session:

- How can COL help you respond to the COVID crisis?
- What are the new development trends?
- How can COL further your national agenda? Give top three priorities.

Discussion following Professor Kanwar's presentation noted the increased relevance for COL post-COVID 19 and the advantages for countries and institutions whose capability COL had already built in online learning.

Session 2: Presentation of Country Reports and Survey by COL Vice President, Dr Balaji, Dr Balaji made a presentation on the feedback from a regional consultation process conducted between July and November 2019 and survey and country reports input by Pacific Focal Points ahead of the meeting. The presentation had been prepared by COL's Education Specialist: TVSD, Ms Terry Neal, who could not join the meeting as planned.

The regional consultation had identified eight regional priorities grouped into three themes:

- skills development for improving employability
- resilience education, youth development and education of women, girls and the vulnerable
- teacher professional development in primary and secondary education.

Dr Balaji noted four global trends of mass migration of people, advances in technology, changes to the world of work resulting in growing youth unemployment and climate changes. However, disruption of education in response to COVID 19 has eclipsed these as the urgent issue affecting the world. Trends for the Pacific region included vulnerability to risk, dependence on agriculture, fisheries and tourism, health and education challenges, and gaps in transport, ICT and energy infrastructure.

Pacific Focal Points outlined key changes in the region as being increasing access to technology, growing emphasis on skills development and skilling unemployed youth, and response to natural disasters and pandemics. Focal Points had mentioned COL's involvement in improving formal and informal education, teacher training and support in implementing online and offline technology solutions. They identified country priorities as increasing access to education, skills development for employment and agriculture, teacher training across all education sectors, and empowering women.

Some recommendations were raised from the survey outcomes included:

- developing OER
- developing policies
- building local capacity through consultants
- supporting technology solutions
- facilitating cross Commonwealth connections
- extending Transnational Qualifications Framework to TVET

In conclusion, Dr Balaji characterised some possible straplines of COL to perform its important role responding to expectation from Pacific countries:

- Quality learning for sustainable development and inclusiveness
- Lifelong learning for nations building and gender equity
- Literate nation; Leaving no child behind
- Learning for lifelong citizenship; and learning for sustainable development.

Session 3: Country Reflections and Discussions

Representatives from Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu made contribution by sharing their reflections and thoughts on the three questions posed by Professor Kanwar in Session 1.

The contributions of participant can be outlines as follows:

Fiji: Mr Timoci B. Bure confirmed that Fiji's needs are reflected in the survey and similar to those of others in the regions. With school closures due to COVID 19, online teaching and learning has become one of the top priorities nationally.

Nauru: Ms Darrina Kun highlighted COL's support in developing a Kitchen Garden Mobile App which is a joint project between Nauru's Departments of Education and Commerce and Industry. She believes the project will be very useful for the community. The priority for Nauru is capacity building in the use of various technologies.

New Zealand: Ms Amy McAteer shared that New Zealand has also faced challenges in keeping learning going, with schools only having 48-hours notice before needing to close due to COVID-19. There were a lot of lessons learned, and COL could play a role in facilitating sharing of lessons learned across the Pacific region. Ms McAteer agreed with Professor Kanwar that online, open and flexible learning are not just for emergencies but are an effective way of increasing access to education for children, young people and adults. COL is well-placed to work with partners and provide technical expertise to build on regional interest in online learning.

Papua New Guinea: Mr Rayappan commented that COL's resources have helped them respond to COVID 19. However, there is an ongoing challenge in taking online learning to Papua New Guinea's remote places. He reiterated his survey suggestion that COL lead in facilitating partnerships and sharing best practice across the region. During later discussion, Mr Rayappan suggested that COL might support a regional TV channel to enable access to remote islands across the Pacific.

Samoa: Prof Muagututia Dr Ioana Chan Mow emphasised the need to increase teachers' digital literacy and extending use of their Moodle platform to the rest of the school system. TVET is a focus for Samoa as it is across the region. She expressed appreciation for COL's support in building their capability in online competency-based assessment, and providing digital learning materials. Samoa is developing a multimodal national platform for lifelong learning and a digital library, which is an area of priority for seeking assistance from COL.

Tonga: Ms Sipola Halafihi noted that COL has supported Tonga's higher education sector to offer online learning, including using Aptus. This provided a good base for Tonga's response to COVID-19. The next priority is to empower Tonga's primary and secondary education sectors through building their capacity to teach and learn online. Tonga is reaching all its remote islands through creating videos and materials and offering these through educational TV and radio. Under the new Minister of Education, Tonga has established the first open school in the history of Tonga. Agriculture is important and with COL's support 35 females and 37 males have been trained so that communities can grow a greater variety of crops – proud of gender balance.

Vanuatu: Mr Joses Seth commented that COVID-19 has been a blessing in disguise because it has accelerated the Ministry's ability to promote online education in schools. The focus is ensuring that all

students and teachers can use the country's Moodle platform. The government is negotiating with internet providers to enable internet access in remote areas. Ensuring access for remote regions is a common challenge across the Pacific. Vanuatu's new Minister is convinced of the importance of online learning.

Session 4: Summary and Way Forward

Professor Kanwar thanked the Focal Points for their valuable input. She observed that because of the universal impact of the COVID pandemic, messages from this group were similar to those from other Focal Point meetings. Priorities are technical advice for online education, skills development, reaching learners in remote areas, and improving capacity for teachers as well as learners. Suggestions specific to the Pacific were the importance of strategic partnerships with the key influential players in the region, along with PACFOLD, and sharing lessons learned. She informed participants of the report for Ministers of Education that COL is preparing which will share how countries have responded to COVID 19. Professor Kanwar reiterated te earlier comments that COVID 19 has heightened awareness of the potential of distance learning and technology to improve educational access, reduce cost, improve quality of livelihood, and enhance equity. She also mentioned research which shows that distance education has a lower carbon footprint than traditional forms of education, which will be important as climate change becomes a higher priority in all the regions. Distance education can contribute to building resilient education systems and preparing for future crisis. She shared examples of other countries' existing ecosystems for open education. Challenges remain in how to scale up innovations and make sure nobody is left behind, and to elevate the status of distance education, recognising the research that shows no significant difference in learning outcomes between classroom and distance education. She noted that COL offers both generic and specific support, ending by expressing gratitude for the valuable support of all of the member countries represented.

Annex 1: Pacific Focal Points Meeting Agenda

COL STRATEGIC PLAN 2021 – 2027

COL Pacific Focal Points Meeting (on Zoom)

Wednesday, May 27, 2020 – Pacific Region

Tuesday, May 26, 2020, 3:30 PM-5:30 PM (Vancouver Time)

Final Agenda

This table below using Vancouver Time.

Time		Activity
Start time: 03:30 PM		
3:30 – 3:50 pm	20 mins	Welcome remarks by COL President & CEO Professor Asha S. Kanwar
Session 1		
3:50 – 4:00 pm	10 mins	Presentation of the Focal Points Survey Report Dr V. Balaji, COL Vice President
Session 2		
4:00 – 4:50 pm	50 mins	Reflections (<i>Individual contributions / discussions will follow alphabetical order (by country name)</i>)
Session 3		
4:50 – 5:00 pm	10 mins	Summary and wrap up Dr V. Balaji, COL Vice President
Session 4		

Note: The 'meeting room' will open 30 minutes before start time to allow for any difficulties to be resolved in good time.

Annex 2: List of Participants by Country

#	Country	Contact Information
1	Fiji	Mr Timoci Bure Head of National Education Services Delivery Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Private Mail Bag, Government Buildings Marela House, Thurston Street Suva Fiji Email: timoci.bure@govnet.gov.fj
2	Nauru	Ms Darrina Kun Secretary for Education Department of Education Government Offices Yaren District Nauru Email: darrina.kun@gmail.com
3	New Zealand	Mr. Nathan Hollis Policy Officer, Multilateral Partnerships, Humanitarian, and Multilateral Division Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade 195 Lambton Quay Private Bag 18 901 Wellington 6160 New Zealand Email: Nathan.Hollis@mfat.govt.nz
4	New Zealand	Ms Amy McAteer Principal Development Manager, Education Sustainable Economic Development Division Pacific and Development Group New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade Manatū Aorere Email: amy.mcateer@mfat.govt.nz
5	Papua New Guinea	Mr Anthony Rayappan Principal Flexible Open Distance Education (FODE) Department of Education PO Box 446 Papua New Guinea Email: Anthony_Rayappan@education.gov.pg

6	Papua New Guinea	<p>Mr. Ralph Mosiri Deputy Principal - Services Flexible Open Distance Education (FODE) Department of Education PO Box 446 Papua New Guinea Email: Ralph_Mosiri@education.gov.pg</p>
7	Samoa	<p>Prof Muagututia Dr Ioana Chan Mow Associate Professor, Computing Education National University of Samoa PO Box 1622 Toomatagi, Apia Samoa Email: I.chanmow@nus.edu.ws</p>
8	Tonga	<p>Ms Sipola Halafihi Principal, Tonga Institute of Higher Education Ministry of Education and Training PO Box 161 Nuku'alofa Kingdom of Tonga Email: sipolahalafihi73@gmail.com</p>
9	Vanuatu	<p>Mr Joses Seth Executive Officer Office of the Director General Ministry of Education & Training Private Mail Bag 9028 Port Vila Vanuatu Email: jseth@vanuatu.gov.vu</p>

Annex 3: Summary of Pre-Meeting Consultation

Country reports

Country	Overview COL's work	Priorities	Recommendations	Other
Fiji	General comments about status of e-learning in Fiji's compulsory sector being a higher priority post COVID 19. Tertiary institutions more capable and better able to respond.	L3F – sustainable farming Gender – STEM subjects for females HE – innovation beyond main HE providers OIS – able to respond to COVID and increase access Teacher Ed – effective learning strategies and wider access TVSD – increase access through TEL, government policies TEL – government prioritisation of resources and policies VUSSC – small states collaboration	Smaller states moving to ODL and e-L for primary and secondary school levels	ODL and e-L capability building
Nauru	Mobile kitchen garden app	Relevant National Sustainable Development Strategy goals: L3F – increase domestic food production Gender – gender equality already on Nauru HE – USP campus in place OIS – continuing education and skills development Teacher Ed – local teaching capacity low, need Nauru capacity TVSD – revived and in Learning Village TEL – access at individual level VUSSC – limited by Nauruans being able to pay	Nauru is dependent on financial aid and cannot lock down fully in response to COVID 19, as other small Pacific states have been able to do. Still need to import food and medicines. Needs broader sources of revenue	Continuity of personnel in projects for greater efficiency
PNG	Gender based empowerment Enrolment in MOOC courses Youth workers upskilled COL support to FODE for capacity building in online learning	L3F curriculum for SD Gender – Skills development and ODL for women in remote villages HE – network of HE DE institutions OIS – build capacity STEM, integrate TVET CBA, use new technologies to deliver learning resources, access to OER Teacher Ed - use of OER, TEL skills, MOOC courses helpful TVSD – TEL – use of OER, ICT infrastructure VUSSC – high dropout rate, bottle next due to limited spaces	Support FODE roll out into 89 districts Bottleneck in tertiary institutions, VUSSC as solution	

Samoa	NUS TEL – including national digital library 15 Aptus devices Extend Moodle to schools	L3F mobile app for farmers, link to national digital library, degree and diploma programmes Gender – Gender disparity in achievement and participation HE – quality, access, relevance, effective and efficient/sustainable OIS – revise curriculum, repackage TVET Teacher Ed – more qualified staff, pre and in service, address shortages TVSD – quality, relevance – registration, accreditation, surveys, TVET teacher training TEL – ICT policy, increase uptake of ICT for teaching, infrastructure and training VUSSC – more publicity, increase access for marginalised people	Want COL support in all areas, specifically <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital literacy for teachers - Moodle platform for blended delivery - Pros and cons for TVET online - Applying TQF to recognise local TVET quals - Contextualise VUSSC materials 	Training TVET teachers in CBA VUSSC and lifelong learning for disadvantaged groups
Tonga	TIHE and TloE – OER and use of Aptus when internet is limited	L3F – use Aptus in School of Agriculture Gender – HE – train other institutions on Aptus use OIS – Teacher Ed – teaching online, Aptus as back up TVSD – TEL – VUSSC –	Replace older version of Aptus Resilience project	
Vanuatu	OIS – OER linked to Vanuatu curriculum, use of Aptus to access due to limited connectivity	L3F – agriculture backbone of country Gender – equal participation for girls and boys HE – increase access OIS – increase capacity for Years 11-13 Teacher Ed – train teachers to improve quality of education TVSD – backbone of the country’s economy TEL – OER beyond Grades 10-12 VUSSC – access for those who cannot travel to urban centres	Continue support for school OER Scale up OIS project to other provinces	

Survey results

Country	Fiji	Nauru	PNG	Samoa
Changes in the region	Technology use greater Continue access during natural disasters and pandemics		Skills training for unemployed youth Use of IT technology improving, more services offered. Foci: 1. Skills training for sustainability and economical development. 2. Gender equity awareness programs through public and private partnership. 3. TEL. 4. Life skills training - marginalized and rural community 5. Adaptability - respond and live with natural disasters like earthquake, flooding and pandemics.	Stronger emphasis onTVET Pandemic - need more technology and medical graduates More education and training providers - public or private. Increasing frequency and severity of extreme climate events – disruptive and threaten our very existence Global, but more pronounced in our weak developing nations. Problems of access to technology and its affordability thus worsening the digital divide.
Key strategic priorities	More schools can engage in ODL, parents and community can access, upskill so more employable – cross government collaboration for training for employment Sec- by 2024 all schools and homes can access ODL, increase access HE – already ODL, FHEC - Fulton project for TVET teachers, FHEC ODL policy	Grow economy - use domestic and natural resources Improve the health, education and quality of living - just, healthy and productive community Reliable and sustainable infrastructure to meet the socio-economic needs of its population	All PNG children – at least grade 12 or equivalent by 2026. In 6 yrs, 70% Educational centres in every district Affordable and compatible education and skills trainings by 2022, incl rural areas Promote SMEs and women empowerment Promote agriculture and rural economy for sustainable economic development	1: Economic Macroeconomic resilience Agriculture and fisheries productivity Export products Tourism Private Sector 2: Social Health and well being Quality education and training Social institutions 3: Infrastructure

	<p>Teacher Ed – train teachers in and with ODL, increase access, reduce cost VET – shortage of trades in building industries LL – trades, tourism, agriculture</p> <p>Technical assistance, funding, capacity building</p>	<p>Strengthen and develop institutions such as Public Service and Justice System</p> <p>Barriers - Capacity and Human Resource required to achieve outcomes</p>	<p>Expand teacher training institutions – especially short of science, maths and ICT graduate teachers</p> <p>Barriers - Lack of govt support for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - infrastructure and funding - graduates to taking up teaching jobs <p>Socio-economic factors Cultural barriers eg community non-cooperation and gender related issues.</p>	<p>Clean water and sanitation Transport systems and networks ICT connectivity Energy supply 4: Environment Environmental resilience Climate and disaster resilience</p> <p>OIS and HE: Quality Access, greater completions Relevance, employment Effectiveness - decision making is informed by data analysis, research, policy and reviews Efficiency and sustainability</p> <p>Teacher Ed More qualified teachers – in service and pre service, PD</p> <p>TVSD QA systems National quals, CB Competent workforce Participation Relevance Pathways Management and leadership Inclusivity</p> <p>Lifelong learning National platforms eg mobile app for farmers</p>
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				Barriers – financial and human resources, climate change, natural disasters, pandemics; change management
COL's initiatives and interventions	TEL - policies in new institutions, innovative courses	Support - Capacity building, technical assistance, research and evaluation	Support - Skills training for unemployed youth Awareness on literacy and gender equity Train the trainers Technical assistance to collect data from rural communities OER and MOOCs Teacher training and TVET. Use of technology in agricultural sector IT enabled services for open schooling. Help FPs understand all the project happening in their countries	ALL, especially Digital literacy programmes for teachers, incl Use of Moodle for blended delivery of courses Establish SKSI platform, esp OERs Experiences in blended TVET - pros and cons Applying TQF for recognition of local TVET qualifications Development or contextualisation of existing VUSSC OER
Specific target groups and focus areas	Youth, farmers, women Climate change, education, AI, disability	Target: Displaced people Focus area: Climate change education	Women and girls People with disabilities Unemployed youth	All - effects of climate change and pandemics for our region and the digital divide in technology All - technology education and training and national online platforms
Partnerships for lifelong learning	HEI, MOE, Employers Federation, MoL, Workers Union		Church and NGOs, private training institutions link to labour market.	SQA, Ministry Commerce and Labour, Ministry of Women, UN agencies link to labour market

<p>Bringing innovations to scale</p>	<p>HEI policies ODL and OER to address gaps between haves and have nots, using technology Reducing cost, increasing access</p>	<p>Efficiency in existing training systems, train more people</p>	<p>Trial certain projects Introduce technology innovations and OER Train more professionals</p>	<p>Training Online competency-based assessments Assist with national SKSI platform – lifelong learning, digital library and open access research repository Build local capacity, rather than continually send in external consultants</p>
<p>Other</p>	<p>Learning for lifelong citizenship Appreciation for COL</p>		<p>Quality learning for sustainable development and inclusiveness Lifelong learning for nations building and gender equity Literate nation: Leaving no child behind New approaches eg partnerships across continents/regions COL TV channel or YouTube portal Sponsor skills training for unemployed youth, incl placement within Pacific countries Exchange programs for skilled labourers with neighboring countries Connect ODL students and teachers through internet</p>	<p>Appreciation for COL COVID response</p>