

Pacific Early Age Readiness and Learning Workshop a Success

Third Regional Training Session Brings Together Pacific Education Experts

PORT VILA, July 14, 2017 – More than 80 Pacific Islanders working in early childhood education and readiness came together this week in Port Vila, Vanuatu, to discuss best practice, and share experiences and responses to address the challenges commonly experienced in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating education programs and policies in the Pacific. The workshop was supported by the Pacific Early Age Readiness and Learning (PEARL) Program.

Representatives from Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Fiji were welcomed by the **Vanuatu Minister of Education, Hon. Jean-Pierre Nirua**, who spoke about the importance of early childhood readiness and the workshop's contributions to it.

"I wish to take this rare opportunity to commend and extend a profound gratitude with special acknowledgement to the World Bank for the strong interest and visible actions that the Bank has taken to support education; in particular the Global Partnership for Education for the financing of this workshop that is aimed at raising the level of consciousness and the importance on the need to raise and sustain competency levels in literacy for our children at young age for first internally or locally, before they venture out into the region and beyond to face the withstand sporadic challenges," said **Minister Nirua**.

The program included visits to local preschools and primary schools. Vanuatu has recently implemented a multi-lingual policy, which has seen a shift to using the common language spoken by children (i.e. a vernacular-language medium of instruction) for years 1-3, before introducing a second or third language. Multi-lingual teaching is a common challenge for many Pacific Island countries, so exploring different options for educating in multi-lingual environments was seen as a particularly welcome part of the workshop for many participants.

"This workshop was a great opportunity to hear from others in the region, and for all participants to see first-hand early childhood care in Vanuatu," said **Roy Obed, workshop participant and Director of Education and Services at the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training**. *"We were able to learn about new initiatives taking place and I'm excited to take some of these ideas home with me."*

The workshop also included sessions on community-based play activities and awareness raising about the importance of reading with children from an early age. Each country's participants also worked through their own program objectives and outlined a plan for moving forward and introducing initiatives such as sounding out words, policy changes and promoting an increased focus on learning during a child's first years of life.

"Birth to 5 are some of the most important years of a child's life. What happens then can influence a child's physical, mental and cognitive development, and later on their learning outcomes, career prospects and life-span," said **Binh Vu, Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank**. *"PEARL works across the Pacific to share knowledge and support countries implement school readiness and early grade reading that works best in each country's context."*

The PEARL program works with Pacific Island countries to improve child readiness and learning, as well as teacher training for the early years of school. In Tonga, the program is supporting communities to organize play-based activities so children are better prepared for school, while helping teachers improve the learning outcomes of their students in the first grades of primary education. Recently, an awareness campaign aimed at encouraging parents to spend 10 minutes each day reading with their very young children was rolled out across Tonga, which included a TV series and a [song, Tu'o taha 'i he 'aho \(Once a day\)](#). Radio talkback programs have had enthusiastic participation from parents and teachers, and nearly 80% of parents in the main islands of Tonga have engaged with the campaign.

PEARL is funded by the [Global Partnership for Education](#) and implemented by the [World Bank](#). PEARL has two key goals: to support children to develop key skills that will be useful at school, and to help more children learn to read and write well in their first years of primary school, which has knock-on effects throughout their education.

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