

Pacific Heads of Health Meeting

Réunion des directeurs de la santé du Pacifique

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Strengthening collaboration between UNICEF and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories

1. BACKGROUND

UNICEF Pacific Islands office, based in Suva, Fiji, supports 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) that include Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The office operates through five field offices based in Kiribati, North Pacific (FSM), Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Child survival is at the very heart of what UNICEF does, and UNICEF's health and nutrition programme in the Pacific is focused on this to ensure that children survive and thrive and are able to achieve their full potentials in life. Children face numerous threats to their health that include vaccine preventable diseases such as measles, diphtheria, pertussis diarrheal diseases, leptospirosis, dengue fever and typhoid fever; and to their nutrition that include stunting, anemia and obesity in addition to micro-nutrient deficiencies. Undernutrition especially in the first 2 years of a child's life not only decreases a child's chances of surviving but also prevents the child from the critical growth and development of the brain, thus impairing its cognitive functions and affect learning.

<https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/health-and-nutrition>

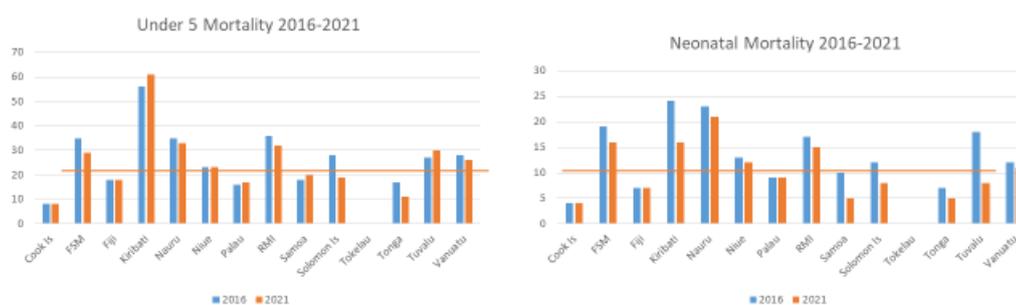
UNICEF is committed to working with the PICTs and through other coordination mechanisms including the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) to collaboratively support countries' efforts at addressing challenges that affect children and adolescents to enable them to achieve their full potentials

2. ACTION TAKEN

UNICEF's planning cycle 2023-2027 has just been finalized following a situation analysis that included reviewing progress made in the current planning cycle 2018-2022 and looking at changing landscape, new horizons and developing situations including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and emergencies in the Pacific. Findings from the situation analysis include the following:

- High levels of child mortality in six countries (Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, Tuvalu, FSM, & Vanuatu)

Mortality Trends in the Pacific



- Under 5 mortality generally unchanged with some decline
- Countries not on track: FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, Tuvalu

- Neonatal mortality generally declined with some significant decline
- Countries not on track: FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, RMI

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- The high burden of pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, and sepsis contributing to the unacceptable levels of child morbidity in at least six PICTs (Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, Tuvalu, FSM, & Vanuatu)
- High levels of all forms of malnutrition amongst children 0-18 years, particularly childhood stunting in at least five (RMI, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Nauru & Kiribati) PICTs, anaemia among children 0-59 months and women (aged 15-49) as well as overweight and obesity among children 5-19 years across the Pacific.

The WHO-UNICEF estimates of national immunization coverage (WUENIC) released mid-July 2022 is reflecting the impact of the pandemic and the response measures taken by countries on immunization comparing 2019 and 2021 coverage. PICTs are affected in varying ways with Samoa making the most gains of 17 percent because it started from relatively low coverage of 68% in 2019 for the third dose of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis-containing vaccines (DTP3). The worst affected country is Vanuatu that lost 28 percent down to 62 percent in 2021. Solomon Islands, FSM, RMI and Kiribati are also impacted.

Some regional trends impacting children in the Pacific include increased frequency of natural disasters. The World Risk Index ranks five PICTs among the top 20 most at-risk countries (Vanuatu #1, Solomon Islands #2, Tonga #3, Fiji #14 & Kiribati #19).

[https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/world-risk-report-2021-focus-social-](https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/world-risk-report-2021-focus-social-protection)

[protection](https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/world-risk-report-2021-focus-social-protection) There is also slow economic growth and increasing poverty rates, exacerbated by impacts of COVID-19 and natural disasters leading to increasing youth unemployment and poverty due to their high representation among the population with around 40% of the population under 18 years of age.

Some of the global UNICEF Health Strategic Plan 2022-2025 components receiving focus in the new MCPD include strengthen PHC and implementing high-impact interventions to accelerate end of preventable maternal, neonatal and child deaths, and stillbirths and high impact nutrition interventions as part of PHC.

3. CONCLUSIONS

UNICEF work will anchor around building sustainable systems and advance universal health coverage. Lessons learned and leveraging COVID-19 pandemic attain resilient health system that can deliver quality essential primary health care services

- UNICEF current and next country works along the line of the Pacific Head of Health 2021 deliberation ‘to attain resilient health systems by 2031’ particularly in implementing ‘on plan, on budget’, promoting role delineating policy in PHC, sub-regional health systems strengthening, service provision assessments and quality improvement in PHC, continuous professional development of nurses and health care workers, strengthening health information system and digitalization, delivery of

essential health service and improving routine immunization coverage through catch up vaccination drives

- While we have initiated sub-national HSS in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, UNICEF will support in strengthening the work in the three countries and further expand in more countries in the new country programme
- Climate resilient, inclusive, gender sensitive and mainstreaming, adolescent friendly PHC packages, solarization of health facilities, strengthening of cold chain infrastructure and vaccine management, support in sustainability of immunization and vaccine initiative will be part of the 2023-27 CPD
- Beyond stunting and micronutrient supplementation, UNICEF will work in addressing anaemia and obesity 5-19 years and adolescents.