

**Concept Note and Tentative Programme**  
**Pacific Islands Regional Conference**  
**“Innovative Financing for Inclusive ICT in Education”**  
**4 May 2021**

## **Background**

Over the past decade, countries in the Pacific Island subregion have made significant progress in their education systems through increasing access and retention, provision of enabling environments for learning and increasing the quality of teachers.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, the *Pacific Education for All Review* revealed that universal primary education has generally been met across the region, resulting in higher levels of participation in secondary education and adult literacy rates.<sup>2</sup> However, quality of education remains an issue with persisting gender disparities in learning attainment and equity gaps that prevent children with disabilities, those on outer islands, out-of-school children and other vulnerable populations from fully accessing and benefiting from schooling.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, quality education is also inextricably linked with ensuring the appropriate skills and competencies for youth, who make up 22.6% of the population, so that they are equipped for meaningful employment and decent work.<sup>4</sup>

Since 2018, UNESCO has been working with Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to address these existing gaps and challenges through the strategic use of ICT in education. With generous support from the Korean Funds-in-Trust, the “Innovative Financial Planning in Technology-Enabled Education to Achieve SDG 4 in Asia-Pacific” project aims to support countries in building capacity to strategically develop policies and integrate ICT into their national education systems to achieve the SDG4 targets and in alignment with the countries’ sector-wide national education plans.

ICT and broadband connectivity enable technological innovations that can help address challenges in education as well as a range of other development sectors.<sup>5</sup> However, there are several limiting factors to unlocking the potential of ICT in education in the Pacific Islands region, where an estimated 40% still do not have access to the Internet. According to the United Nations report on “Broadband Connectivity in Pacific Island Countries”<sup>6</sup>, high costs of equipment and the Internet limit the sector’s ability to capitalize on modern forms of ICT. Schools have reported short life span of equipment, due to the lack of effective systems of maintenance as well as difficulties to keep up-to-date with rapid changes in technology. Meanwhile, teachers’ capacity to effectively use and teach with ICT tools and content also remains low.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific-education-for-all-2015-review-en\\_1.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific-education-for-all-2015-review-en_1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific-education-for-all-2015-review-en\\_1.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific-education-for-all-2015-review-en_1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific-education-for-all-2015-review-en\\_1.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/pacific-education-for-all-2015-review-en_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20%20State%20of%20Pacific%20Youth%202017%20Report%20HRv3%20%28web%29%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Broadband%20Connectivity%20in%20Pacific%20Island%20Countries.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Broadband%20Connectivity%20in%20Pacific%20Island%20Countries.pdf>

The challenges of ICT in education are connected to the unique challenges already experienced in the education systems Pacific Islands region due to limited economic resources, geographic remoteness, population migration and environmental issues. School closures from the COVID-19 pandemic also revealed the limited readiness of the education system to support alternative modalities such as remote and distance learning. Despite these challenges, it is expected that by 2021, a major shift will occur as most Pacific countries will be connected via submarine fiber-optic cables and the remaining countries likely to be connected to broadband.<sup>7</sup> The rapid increase in connectivity presents opportunities to capture the full range of benefits of ICT to the education sector.<sup>8</sup> These improvements will need to be mirrored with increased investments in areas such as teacher capacity, digital resources, and appropriate information systems to ensure that all students will be able to equally benefit.

Financing for national ICT in education can significantly increase funding requirements for education systems and can present a challenge for governments to adequately and sustainably implement their programmes. In terms of funding, small PICs often face structural gaps between domestic revenues and public expenditure due in part to their small economies and the scattered distribution of their populations, as well as the high cost of imported inputs. As a result, there tends to be a persistent financing gap, with most PICs reliant on some combination of grants from development partners, trust fund flows and loans.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is critical for governments to properly strategize and align their ICT in education planning with strategic investments and financing.

In this context, UNESCO will organize the Pacific Regional Conference on ICT in Education with the theme of “**Innovative Financing for Inclusive ICT in Education**” on 4 May 2021. The conference will examine and share lessons learned from developing national ICT in education policies, strategies, and financing that address the urgent education contexts of the Pacific Islands region and beyond. It will emphasize the practical aspects of implementing innovative financing, resource mobilization, and partnerships to ensure financial viability and sustainability of ICT in education projects. This conference will bring together education policymakers, development organizations, private sector partners, and education stakeholders together to share their financial planning experiences and foster partnerships through building a better understanding of their strategic directions, procedures, needs and opportunities.

The Conference will also feature the following sessions:

### **1. Launch of the UNESCO ICT in Education Financial Planning Resource**

Based on its experiences supporting Member States to develop national ICT in Education Master Plans, UNESCO Bangkok will launch a comprehensive “Financial Planning Resource”<sup>10</sup> with structured guidance for ICT in education costing and financial planning. This resource supports policymakers to make accurate cost estimates for ICT programmes and projects based on interactive case studies and costing models for different country contexts.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/UNESCAP%202030%20AGENDA%20BOOKLET%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/428221/ict-education-pacific.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/937241499149363986/pp-F4D-background-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://fpr.ictpolicy.guide>

## **2. Thematic Brief on Innovative Financing for ICT in Education**

In preparation for the conference, a thematic brief on “Innovative Financing for ICT in Education” will be developed with case studies of good practices for financing of effective and sustainable ICT in education projects. A special session will be held during the Conference to present the findings and the discussions and lessons learned, which will be integrated into the thematic brief.

### **Objectives**

This conference aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Share regional experiences of developing and implementing national ICT in education policy in light of COVID-19;
- Provide a knowledge base and platform for innovative financing, partnership building and resource mobilization for ICT in education;
- Launch the UNESCO ICT in Education Policy Planning Guide and Financial Planning Resource;
- Showcase innovative financial plans and solutions for ICT in education activities;
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships for Pacific and beyond;
- Develop a thematic brief on innovative financing for ICT in education;

### **Expected Outcome and Outputs**

The primary outcome of the conference will be increased dissemination of knowledge on ICT in education policy planning, with particular relevance to COVID-19 responses and awareness of innovative financing mechanisms. Stakeholders and institutions actively engaged in ICT in education policy planning will be recognized for the efforts made in developing ICT master plans and policies. Furthermore, the subsequent discussions will lead to improved understanding of the array of activities and best practices to support successful ICT in education policy and financial planning.

The key output will be a thematic brief that would serve as a compendium of conference proceedings containing a summary of the experiences of innovative financing, partnership building, and resource mobilization.

### **Expected participants**

Ministry of Education officials, donor and multilateral agencies, financing practitioners, educational technology solution providers and development partners. The event is open to the general public.

### **For more information:**

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- Aya Aoki, Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO Apia, [a.aoki@unesco.org](mailto:a.aoki@unesco.org)

### **Modality**

The webinar will be conducted online via Zoom. Please register at the following link: <https://unesco-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYtd--trzwtE9Vnbd3UQPJfRfCJFo5oCbdj>

**TENTATIVE PROGRAMME**

<b>4 May 2021</b> <b>0800-1100 Bangkok time / 1400-1700 Apia time</b> <b>Zoom Online Conference</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Speaker/Organization</b>
<b>5 mins</b>	Welcome remarks	UNESCO Bangkok
<b>5 mins</b>	Opening remarks	UNESCO Apia
<b>15 mins</b>	Keynote presentation	<i>TBA</i>
<b>15 mins</b>	Session 1: Overview of project & Launch of UNESCO Policy Planning Guide and Financial Planning Resource	UNESCO Bangkok
<b>45 mins</b>	Session 2: Country learnings from ICT in education policy planning	Country presentations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kiribati</li> <li>- Maldives</li> <li>- Solomon Islands</li> </ul>
<b>5 mins</b>	Break	
<b>15 mins</b>	Session 3: Thematic Brief Findings on Innovative Financing for ICT in Education	Matthew Griffin, Consultant
<b>15 mins</b>	Sub-theme 1: Financing mechanisms	<i>TBA</i>
<b>15 mins</b>	Sub-theme 2: Partnerships	<i>TBA</i>
<b>15 mins</b>	Sub-theme 3: Resource mobilization	<i>TBA</i>
<b>20 mins</b>	Q&A	
<b>10 mins</b>	Closing remarks and ways forward	UNESCO Bangkok