

Pacific Youth Engagement, Empowerment and Economic Pathways

EVALUATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pacific Youth Engagement, Empowerment and Economic Pathways (PYEEEP) pilot has delivered a credible proof of concept for inclusive, youth-led pathways to employment and empowerment in the Pacific. PYEEEP connects disengaged young people, those not in employment, education, or training (NEET), with tailored pathways into skills training, internships, and small-business opportunities. It does not purport to provide instant solutions, but it has shown that when programs are grounded locally and designed with young people, real shifts can happen.

PYEEEP wasn't built in isolation. It drew directly on the Pacific Youth Development Framework, national youth strategies, and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Rather than copying a regional template, the pathways were shaped through community profiling and validation workshops. The model remains highly relevant to regional and national youth priorities, demonstrating that holistic, country-driven approaches can re-engage disengaged youth, improve employability, and help governments think differently about youth inclusion.

The results, while still early, are promising. The program improved youth confidence, employability, and wellbeing. Around a quarter of graduates from Cohort 1 secured paid work, while others advanced into further training or self-employment. Families reported greater pride, reduced financial stress, and stronger household relationships. Employers, for their part, noticed a change in discipline and professionalism, though a few still raised concerns about consistency and punctuality. Ministries and training providers began to see youth NEET less as a "problem group" and more as potential contributors.

Resources were managed efficiently, with underspend linked to delayed start-up and cost-saving partnerships. Despite relatively medium to high costs per youth, wrap-around supports such as stipends, transport, childcare, and counselling proved essential to retention and completion. Efficiency gains are expected as cohorts expand, and functions are absorbed into existing TVET and government systems.

National steering structures and in-kind government support demonstrate early ownership. But turning that early ownership into full institutionalisation will depend on consistent funding and technical backup. Gender equality and inclusion were embedded across all pathways, yet systematic documentation of disability participation and intersectional outcomes remains limited. Overall, the evaluation draws on a sufficiently strong and credible evidence base to support well-founded conclusions about PYEEEP's relevance, effectiveness, and early signs of impact, notwithstanding the data and access constraints.

PYEEEP's stakeholders favour phased expansion of the pilot program, including consolidating quality and evidence within Tonga and Solomon Islands before broader rollout. The model's combination of skills training, psychosocial support, and policy engagement offers a strong foundation for replication. The challenge will be to keep the locally led, inclusive and youth-centred spirit alive as the program grows.

List of Acronyms

ATI	Ahopanilolo Technical Institute
BP	Business Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
HRSD	Human Rights and Social Development Division
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRTC	Kaotave Rural Training Centre
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MELKMC	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Knowledge Management & Communications Framework
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MMDC	Mary Mazzarello Development Centre
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Tonga)
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (Solomon Islands)
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NSC	National Steering Committee
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicator
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (Scheme)
PACER Plus	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus
PLANET	People-centred, Local solutions, Accountability and transparency, Non-discrimination and inclusion, Empowerment and equality, Transforming social norms
PMYM	Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting
PYDF	Pacific Youth Development Framework
PYEEEP	Pacific Youth Engagement, Empowerment and Economic Pathways
RAG	Regional Advisory Group
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer (Scheme – New Zealand)
RTC	Rural Training Centre
SBD	Solomon Islands Dollar
SICCI	Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry
SIITP	Solomon Islands Internship Training Program
SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
SPC	The Pacific Community
TCCI	Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry
TIST	Tonga Institute of Science and Technology
TOP	Tongan Pa'anga (currency)
TTI	Tupou Tertiary Institute
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TWG	Technical Working Group
VfM	Value for Money

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF PYEEEP

The PYEEEP programme, funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and implemented by the Pacific Community's (SPC) Human Rights and Social Development (HRSD) Division, was launched in June 2022. PYEEEP was designed in response to persistently high levels of youth NEET across the Pacific. Rates that in some countries, such as Kiribati and Solomon Islands, approach or exceed 50%. These figures highlight the significant challenges and vulnerabilities facing Pacific youth, including young women, rural youth, and those with disabilities.

The programme builds on the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF 2014–2023) and aligns with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, national youth policies, and broader commitments to inclusive development. PYEEEP supplements conventional education and training systems by providing alternative, inclusive pathways that integrate technical, vocational, and life skills training with internships, work readiness, psychosocial support, and youth leadership opportunities. It also promotes system-level changes by engaging governments, private sector, and civil society partners to institutionalise youth pathways within policy and service delivery frameworks.

Initially piloted in Tonga and Solomon Islands, The SPC team worked with selected TVET partners including Tupou Tertiary Institute (TTI) and Ahopanilolo Technical Institute (ATI) in Tonga, and Kaotave Rural Training Centre (KRTC) and Mary Mazzarello Development Centre (MMDC) in Solomon Islands, to adapt existing vocational courses into PYEEEP-branded pathways. Each institution incorporated work-readiness, human-rights, and social-inclusion modules developed by SPC into their curriculum. Specifically, SPC required partners to:

- Integrate literacy, numeracy and computer skills modules;
- Deliver lessons on human rights and social inclusion using SPC-developed content; and
- Provide psychosocial and pastoral support to students.

SPC also provided layered and contextualised training for institution staff to strengthen administrative, financial and reporting capacities aiming to address gaps in partner literacy, procurement and inclusion practices

After completing their vocational courses, youth transitioned into 10-week structured internships organised through SPC, training institutions, and national Chambers of Commerce. These placements linked participants directly with local employers such as aged-care providers and hotels in Tonga, and electrical firms and hospitality businesses in Solomon Islands. SPC and its partners then provided post-training support, including career-readiness workshops on CV writing and interviews, entrepreneurship sessions, continued psychosocial counselling, and limited child-care and transport subsidies. This combination of practical work experience and wrap-around guidance helped participants consolidate their skills and prepare for employment or further training.

PYEEEP recruited 80 NEET youth in its first cycle. By the end of 2024, 62 youth (32 in Solomon Islands and 30 in Tonga) had graduated from accredited training programmes, with outcomes including employment, further study, and entrepreneurship. Beyond training, the programme established structured governance arrangements such as National Steering Committees (NSCs), Technical Working Groups (TWGs), and a Regional Advisory Group (RAG), positioning PYEEEP as a model for youth economic empowerment across the Pacific.

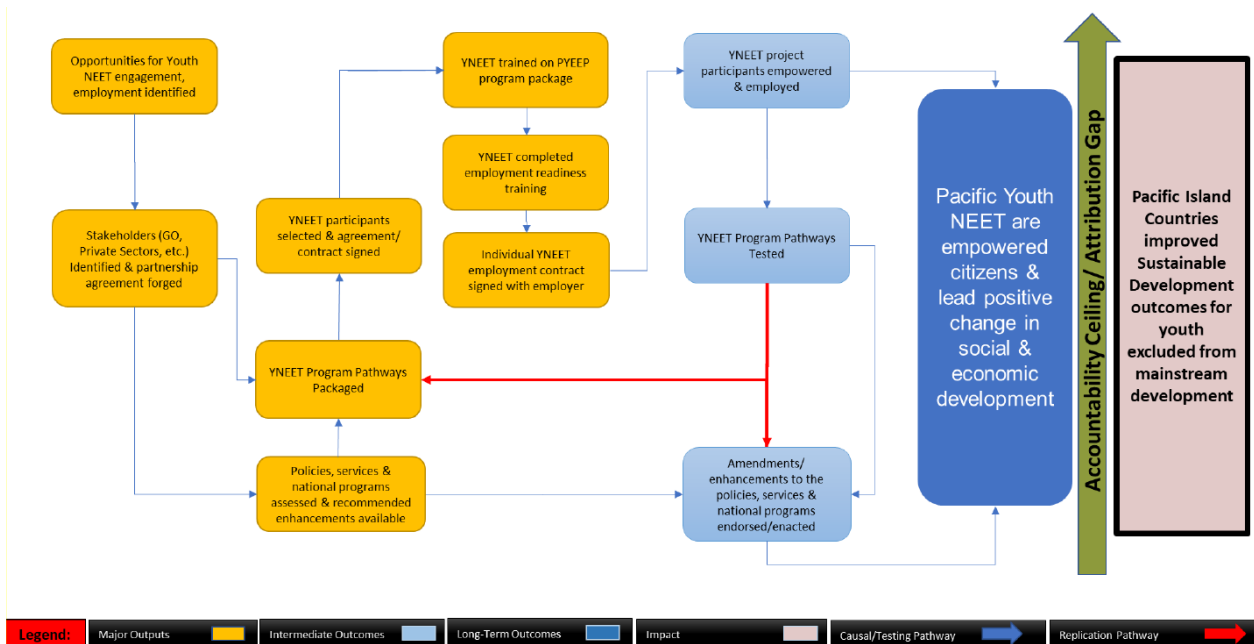


Figure 1. PYEEEP Simplified Theory of Change

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation assessed the PYEEEP pilot in line with the purpose and objectives outlined in the Terms of Reference. Specifically, this evaluation provided an assessment of the Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence, Sustainability, and Inclusive Development aspects of the PYEEEP Activity. Evaluation findings will be used for decision making to inform SPC, New Zealand and Partners for future investment in Pacific Youth NEET.

1. The extent to which the PYEEEP Activity remained a relevant priority for Pacific governments within the context of their National Youth Frameworks or policies, the Pacific Youth Development Framework and SPC's Youth programme, and whether the focus of each of the components remained appropriate.
2. Results that had been achieved to date for Phase 1 as set out in the Monitoring Evaluation Learning Knowledge Management Communications framework (MELKMC).
3. Options, and recommendations on scale up considerations to inform SPC's Youth programme, both within and across countries and the extent to which the approaches and lessons could be considered for similar programmes and replicated/adapted.

The scope of the evaluation included:

1. Assessing progress made across all components of the activity, over the duration of activity implementation in Tonga and Solomon Islands, including against the monitoring and results framework and theory of change of the activity.
2. Identifying synergies and complementarity with other New Zealand youth NEET investments in the region in Solomon Islands and Tonga.

The scope of the evaluation excluded:

1. Assessing Partner country (Tonga and Solomon Islands) contributions to areas aligned to the PYEEEP outcomes including against all the priorities in the Pacific National Youth Development Framework 2014-2023.
2. Assessing the work of other development partners working in the similar areas.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation of PYEEEP adopted a youth-led, participatory, mixed-methods design, consistent with MFAT's evaluation principles of inclusiveness, rigour, and utility. The design positioned young people as active partners in shaping, generating, and interpreting evidence, ensuring their lived experiences were central to findings and recommendations.

Key Features

- **Youth-led and participatory approach:** Five youth graduates and representatives of National Youth Councils contributed to the evaluation scope and tool design. Youth from the program took the lead in facilitating role plays within the focus groups and participated in sense making workshops. Participatory tools (in-person interviews, role play and digital storytelling) were used to amplify youth voice and ensure cultural resonance.
- **Mixed methods:** Quantitative surveys (graduates, dropouts) were combined with qualitative key informant interviews (youth, training providers, government, employers), focus groups and sense-making sessions provide both breadth and depth of evidence.
- **Culturally responsive and inclusive:** Data collection was adapted for local contexts in Tonga and Solomon Islands, with gender-sensitive facilitation, disability-accessible venues, and support for vulnerable youth (e.g., young mothers, rural youth).
- **Theory-based evaluation:** Analysis was structured against PYEEEP's Theory of Change and MELKMC framework, using contribution analysis and recognising PYEEEP's pilot nature and complex operating environment.
- **Value for Money assessment:** The Oxford Policy Management (OPM) framework guided VfM analysis across economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and cost-effectiveness.
- **Learning focus:** Sense-making workshops with SPC, MFAT, and stakeholders co-validated emerging findings. Key informant interviews with all stakeholders included some focus on building an understanding of forward-looking recommendations.

2.2 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation questions drew on learning questions within the MELKMC, placing emphasis on youth-led inquiry and empowerment, evidence-informed policy advocacy, cross-cutting analysis (GEDSI, human rights, participation), and learning for scale-up and replication.

Relevance	1. To what extent is PYEEEP aligned with regional and national youth commitments, including the Pacific Youth Development Framework, National Youth Policies in Tonga and Solomon Islands?
	2. To what extent did the program address the priority needs of NEET youth in each country context and in the region?
	3. How well were the selected pathways aligned with local labour market demand and youth aspirations?

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Effectiveness	4. To what extent did PYEEEP increase the employability, and leadership of participating youth?
	5. What effect did the program have on youth empowerment?
	6. What outcomes have been achieved in terms of employment, self-employment, or further education/training?
	7. To what extent and in what ways has gender equality (and broader GEDSI) been integrated into the design, implementation, and outcomes of the PYEEEP Activity?
	8. What worked in supporting vulnerable youth (e.g., mothers, youth with disabilities)? What could have been done differently?
Efficiency	9. Value for Money (based on Oxford Policy Management framework): To what extent did the Activity deliver value for money, considering Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Equity, and Cost-effectiveness.
Impact	10. What changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour have you observed in youth (before, during, after)?
	11. What changes (intended or unintended) occurred in participants' lives, families, or communities?
	12. How did PYEEEP influence perceptions and practices of employers, training institutions, and governments?
Sustainability	13. What is the likelihood that outcomes (e.g., job placements, partnerships, support services) will be sustained?
	14. What steps have been taken to institutionalise youth pathways within national systems?
Scalability and Learning	15. What lessons and tools from PYEEEP are most relevant for adaptation in other Pacific Island Countries?
	16. What conditions (institutional, financial, political) are necessary to replicate or expand the model?
	17. What are the key risks, merits, and projected costs associated with scaling up the PYEEEP model within or across countries?
	18. What transition options or models would facilitate a smooth handover to national systems, other partners, or a Phase 2 implementation?

2.3 SAMPLING APPROACH

The sampling strategy was designed to be broad and inclusive, with stratification by country, pathway, gender, and completion status. In practice, coverage was mixed, with notable strengths in qualitative depth but gaps in quantitative reach.

Survey implementation fell short of the intended full census of graduates. Only 18 of 62 youth completed the survey (29%), largely due to inactive or missing contact information. All surveys were conducted in-person in

Solomon Islands, which limited geographic and cohort representativeness. However, the survey was one of several complementary data sources, alongside key informant interviews, focus groups, case studies, program data, and administrative records. While the low response rate limits how far the survey alone can represent the full participant population, the qualitative data are rich and robust, giving depth and context that balance the quantitative gaps.

Cohort balance also proved challenging. Many of the graduates from Cohort 1 proved uncontactable, requiring support from Town Officers to locate them. Also, while PYEEEP enrolled roughly equal numbers of men and women across Cohorts 1 and 2, survey responses skewed female, raising potential response bias. Non-completers were also under-represented, with only 4 of 12 dropout surveys achieved. Employer feedback was also constrained, with responses from just four hosts rather than the total 6 from Cohort 1. Two electrical businesses were identified for inclusion in the sample but could not be reached despite multiple contact attempts. In one case, contact details were no longer valid; in the other, the respondent did not attend scheduled interviews. This suggests limited engagement or confidence among some participating employers regarding the evaluation process. This narrowed the evidence base on employment outcomes and employer demand.

By contrast, qualitative components exceeded targets. Thirty-one youth key informant interviews provided rich insights across pathways, gender, and countries, supplemented by eight family interviews (initially unplanned) and a full set of partners and SPC stakeholder interviews. Two persons with a disability were interviewed for this report (one youth, one trainer). These sources offered robust triangulation on household, institutional, and regional dynamics.

Overall, the sampling generated sufficient diversity to support credible triangulation, but the limited survey coverage and employer response mean quantitative findings should be treated as indicative rather than statistically representative.

Tool	Target Group	Planned Sample	Achieved
Youth Outcome Survey	All Cohort 1 graduates	62	18 (all female)
Dropout Survey	Youth who did not complete pathways	12	4 (all female)
Employer KIs	Internship host organisations	6	4
Youth KIs	Diverse youth (by gender, outcome, pathway, disability)	30	31
	<i>Cohort 1 Youth KIs (Graduates)</i>		13 (9 female, 4 male)
	<i>Cohort 2 Youth KIs (Ongoing)</i>		18 (13 female, 5 male)
Families KIs	Guardians of youth participants		8
Country-Level Partner KIs	Training institutions, ministries	8	9
Regional Stakeholder KIs	SPC staff, MFAT staff, regional partners		9
Focus group participants	Youth-Led Design (5) & Data collection (21)	24–32	26
Sense Making Workshop	Ministries, Youth, SPC, Training institutions	29–48	36
Digital storytelling	Youth-led	4	3
Total Sample including Sense Making (some duplication)			144

2.4 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Theory of Change: The PYEEEP Theory of Change provided the foundational lens for assessing the plausibility of results. Analysis was structured around its three medium-term outcomes (pathways created for empowerment and employment, government ownership and coordination, and youth empowerment) and linked back to the long-term goal of Pacific youth NEET being empowered citizens contributing to social and economic development. The MELKMC framework defined the Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs) that guided measurement. Evaluation data were mapped to these indicators.

PLANET Framework: Cross-cutting analysis was guided by the PLANET framework (People-centred, Local solutions, Accountability and transparency, Non-discrimination and inclusion, Empowerment and equality, Transforming social norms). Evaluators deliberately tested PYEEEP's outcomes against each of these six dimensions. Not just whether youth got jobs, but whether the program also advanced inclusion, human rights, equity, and social change. Some examples of using the PLANET framework in analysis include;

- **People-centred:** Evaluation checked whether pathways addressed youth needs directly. For instance, in Tonga, stipends for food and transport enabled NEET youth from low-income households to participate, showing the design was centred on the realities of youth lives.
- **Local solutions:** The Solomon Islands pathways included textiles and catering at MMDC, which aligned with local informal market opportunities for women. This showed the program was tailoring pathways to local economies, rather than imposing imported models.
- **Accountability & transparency:** National Steering Committees and Technical Working Groups (with youth reps) were reviewed as accountability mechanisms. Youth were reported to have a seat at the table to influence decision-making, though their influence on policy was still emerging.
- **Non-discrimination & inclusion:** GEDSI analysis looked at whether marginalised youth (young mothers, youth with disabilities) could access pathways. Childcare subsidies in Solomon Islands and disability-inclusive approaches in Tonga's aged care training were examples.
- **Empowerment & equality:** Evidence was checked for whether pathways improved confidence, leadership, and equal opportunities. The women-only stream at MMDC gave young women a safe entry into training, while men entering aged care and women entering electrical training challenged gender stereotypes.
- **Transforming social norms:** The evaluation captured where youth participation shifted community perceptions. For example, employers who once saw NEET youth as "unreliable" began to view them as assets after internships, representing an early norm shift at the workplace and community level.

Value for Money (VfM): The Oxford Policy Management VfM framework (Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Equity, and Cost-effectiveness) was applied to assess resource use against outcomes. This included analysis of program underspend, unit costs per pathway, and trade-offs between intensive support and scale. Cost-efficiency considerations were balanced against social impact, particularly the enabling role of wraparound support.

Other analytical approaches:

- **Contribution analysis** was applied rather than attribution to assess PYEEEP's role relative to broader systemic and contextual factors, given PYEEEP's pilot status.
- **Triangulation** across quantitative surveys, qualitative case studies, monitoring data, and documentary evidence strengthened validity.
- **Digital storytelling** and participatory sensemaking sessions provided youth-centred evidence and allowed validation of findings with stakeholders

2.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The evaluation was guided by MFAT's evaluation principles and international good practice in ethical, participatory, and youth-sensitive evaluation.

Informed Consent and Disclosure: All participants were fully informed of the purpose of the evaluation, how data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time. Consent processes were adapted to literacy levels and cultural context, with verbal consent accepted where written consent was impractical or inappropriate.

Prevention of Harm and Safeguarding: The evaluation acknowledged risks of emotional discomfort, reputational concerns, and disclosure of sensitive issues (e.g., unemployment, gender discrimination). Trained facilitators applied culturally safe methodologies, ensuring privacy and voluntary participation. Referral pathways were in place for psychosocial support, including existing PYEEEP counselling services.

Confidentiality and Data Protection: Data were anonymised in reporting, with identifiers removed from transcripts and datasets. All raw data was stored securely and only accessible to the evaluation team.

Gender, Disability, and Cultural Responsiveness: Youth were consulted on the need for separate sessions for men, women, and non-binary youth, however all declined and as a result FGDs and sensemaking sessions were not segregated. Female facilitators were used with women participants (i.e., at MMDC). Special measures such as travel subsidies, accessible venues, and flexible scheduling supported the inclusion of young parents, rural youth, and youth with disabilities in the evaluation.

Power imbalances between youth and institutional stakeholders were addressed through youth-only interviews (instructors were not present). Youth retained ownership of their stories by directing the digital storytelling outputs and leading in making sense of the findings.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

The evaluation encompasses all components of PYEEEP implemented in Tonga and Solomon Islands since inception. It also examines PYEEEP's complementarity with other New Zealand-supported NEET initiatives across the Pacific and explores both scalability and sustainability. While PYEEEP's extension to June 2026 means that some pathways have yet to mature, particularly those relating to longer-term employment outcomes, job retention, and policy institutionalisation, sufficient evidence exists to make robust and credible judgements about program performance to date.

Several practical constraints were encountered, yet these do not compromise the overall validity of findings:

- **Sample size and stakeholder access:** Contacting some participants proved challenging, particularly graduates and employers from Cohort 1. Despite this, the evaluation achieved a cross-section of voices from youth, training providers, employers, families, and government partners across both pilot countries, providing a reliable picture of outcomes and perceptions.
- **Cohort balance:** Many Cohort 1 contact numbers were inactive or unresponsive, leading to a stronger representation from Cohort 2 participants. Although their employment trajectories are still emerging, their experiences offer valuable insight into the consistency, relevance, and replicability of the pathways model.
- **Employer engagement:** A small pool of employers from Cohort 1 participated (four of six), and some such as the Solomon Ports Authority required multiple follow-ups or replacement interviews. Nonetheless, the participating employers provided rich, detailed accounts that align closely with youth testimonies, strengthening triangulation.
- **Employment and livelihoods:** Data on sustained employment, income, and job quality are not yet systematically tracked; however, numerous qualitative accounts describe ongoing work, business start-ups, and continued training, supporting early indications of positive livelihood impact.

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- **Equity and inclusion:** Disaggregated data by disability, location, and household circumstances were partial, but qualitative sources and case studies consistently demonstrated strong gender balance, some accessibility for marginalised youth, and clear empowerment outcomes.
- **Attribution limits:** As with most complex, multi-actor pilots, there is no formal counterfactual. The evaluation therefore applies a contribution analysis approach, which credibly demonstrates PYEEEP's role in observed changes while acknowledging external influences.

The desk review and primary data collection together confirm a consistent evidence base: youth empowerment, behavioural change, institutional collaboration, and systemic traction were verified across multiple data sources. Although quantitative data on long-term employment and private sector demand remain limited, these gaps were effectively triangulated through qualitative interviews, surveys, and case studies. GEDSI outcomes, while largely anecdotal, were widely reported and coherently aligned with the program's Theory of Change and MELKMC framework.

In summary, despite expected data and access limitations, the evidence underpinning this evaluation is robust, credible, and sufficient to support confident conclusions about PYEEEP's relevance, effectiveness, and emerging impact.

3. FINDINGS BY EVALUATION CRITERION

3.1 RELEVANCE

1

PYEEEP is highly relevant by design, aligning with regional frameworks (Pacific Youth Development Framework, 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific), national youth priorities, and MFATs inclusive development priorities. It lowered barriers for Youth NEET, offering inclusive, context-appropriate pathways that match youth aspirations and labour needs.

PYEEEP has strong regional/national alignment. The desk review indicates PYEEEP explicitly drew on the PYDF, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific, and national youth policies in Tonga and Solomon Islands. Partners in Solomon Islands and Tonga verified PYEEEP's alignment with national priorities to reduce youth unemployment and strengthen TVET relevance. PYEEEP was also showcased at the 2024 Senior Officials Meeting and the Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting, which helped to re-activate previously sidelined youth priorities, such as youth pathways and multi-stakeholder governance structures, giving them renewed political attention and legitimacy.

Local validation workshops and national youth profiling during the design phase helped tailor pathways (e.g., aged care and disability services at TTI; hospitality at ATI; electrical at KRTC; life skills/textiles at MMDC), ensuring it was demand driven and anchoring the pilots in country priorities and delivery systems. However, these initiatives were more visible at the design and coordination level than in institutional narratives. Training providers did not consistently identify the training of trainers or rights-based mentoring as distinctive sources of value, suggesting that the approach was integrated but not always recognised as a standalone input.

SPC stakeholders emphasised PYEEEP's rights-based framing and the intent to institutionalise pathways via NSCs/TWGs and ministry leadership. This approach translated into practical design features (subsidies, flexible entry/exit, safe spaces for women, disability pathways), governance mechanisms that gave youth a seat at the table, and curriculum content that promoted awareness of rights. This gave the program legitimacy and helped move it beyond a welfare framing toward empowerment and citizenship.

The program is also strongly aligned with MFAT's inclusive development lens and youth/skills agenda by providing alternative pathways for NEET youth, a demographic MFAT has prioritised as "hardest to reach.". It trialled rights-based approaches (childcare, women-only training streams, disability pathways) and foregrounded youth voice. The implementation of the pilot program resonates with MFAT's Blue Pacific framing, particularly the focus on regional models and sharing lessons across Pacific Island Countries.

PYEEEP proved highly relevant to the realities and aspirations of youth NEET, particularly those struggling with financial barriers, low confidence, and caregiving responsibilities. For the youth and their families "second chance" narratives are consistent. Fees, allowances, and approachable pedagogy lowered barriers and youth describe becoming "able to stand on my own two feet" and "more confident... contributing financially at home". Indeed, for the youth that dropped out of the program early, barriers were typically structural (e.g., transport). Several Tongan youths cited unreliable or unaffordable buses. However, these issues were addressed in the second cohort of the program and given the small sample size of dropouts interviewed, care should be taken not to over-generalise.

Aspirations varied across countries. Tongan graduates in aged care often described interest in overseas caregiving roles, while Solomon Islands youth spoke of starting small businesses such as "catering, sewing and tapa printing," which reflect the opportunities available in local markets. Across both countries, family care responsibilities sometimes limited graduates' ability to take up jobs even when opportunities existed.

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National stakeholders in both countries highlighted the need to expand beyond the pilot sectors, calling for new pathways to better meet skills shortages and provide options for rural youth. Tonga's profiling workshop explicitly called for outer-island expansion and agriculture pathways, something that was actioned in recruitment for Cohort 2. Solomons' government representatives pressed for carpentry and rural agricultural training models.

The pathways demonstrated generally good alignment with labour market needs, though there is room to strengthen the way employers are engaged in shaping training and ensuring that internships lead to ongoing jobs.

In Solomon Islands, data shows a NEET rate of approximately 32.5% for ages 15-24 and youth unemployment among 15-24 year-olds is relatively low at a reported 2.98 %¹, but much of the labour market is informal, and a large share of youth struggle to find formal or sustainable employment and employers still often import skilled labour. In Tonga, the rate is high, approximately 21.9% of youth aged 15–24 are NEET², with urban–rural and gender disparities evident. Youth unemployment, (ages 15-24) in Tonga was reported at 6.34% in 2024, according to the World Bank. Noting that the Solomon Islands National Youth Policy 2017-2030 and Tonga National Youth Policy & Strategic Plan of Action 2021-2025, “youth” are defined as persons between the age of 15 and 34 years inclusive and therefore World Bank data on this subject may underestimate the problem. Given this context, pathways that translate into real jobs or enterprises are critical.

Employers such as Heritage Park Hotel in Solomon Islands rated interns' preparedness as “three to four out of five,” noting their discipline and confidence, and most expressed willingness to host again and consider hiring strong performers. However, some supervisors admitted to having little awareness of PYEEEP and felt that “more practical preparation before placements would have helped”.

Finally the evidence shows that while the pilot sectors (aged care, hospitality, electrical, textiles) are relevant, national stakeholders in both countries have expressed a clear preference to expand into carpentry and agriculture, particularly to support rural youth and respond to skills gaps in construction and agricultural value chains. Regional frameworks like the PYDF and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent emphasise *equitable access* across rural and outer islands. In practice, most PYEEEP trainings were delivered through institutions based in urban centres (Honiara, Nuku'alofa). One exception is KRTC in Solomon Islands, which provided a rural delivery model (one hour drive from Honiara). Expansion to rural areas has been raised repeatedly and should be considered in strengthening the relevance of the program going forward.

National youth policies also highlight entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and broader life skills. PYEEEP incorporated several elements of entrepreneurship support within its training model, including structured lessons on business planning, budgeting, and financial literacy, as well as practical materials and tools provided to trainees, such as toolkits for electrical graduates at KRTC and protective equipment for aged-care workers. While these measures represent a solid foundation, they remained largely ad hoc and small-scale. There were no dedicated incubation or seed-funding mechanisms, meaning that the entrepreneurship component of PYEEEP still has scope to deepen and formalise in future phases, better positioning youth as job creators as well as job seekers in line with national policy priorities on self-employment and enterprise development. The current model shows promise in matching youth to market, however deeper employer input into curriculum design, more deliberate bridging of internship to employment in growth sectors, and consideration for post-graduation entrepreneurship opportunities will be essential to improve job uptake and long-term fit with national labour priorities.

¹ World Bank, 2024. *Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15–24) (modelled ILO estimate) – Solomon Islands*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=SB> [Accessed 2 October 2025].

² Tonga Statistics Department, 2021. *Youth Indicators – Census 2021*. Nuku'alofa: Government of Tonga. Available at: <https://tongastats.gov.to/statistics/social-statistics/youth/> [Accessed 2 October 2025].

3.2 EFFECTIVENESS

2

PYEEEP effectively improved the employability, confidence, and leadership of NEET youth, with many families also observing tangible contributions to household wellbeing. Wrap-around support proved decisive for completion. transforming experiences of exclusion into a “second chance to dream.”

Medium-term Outcome 1: Pathways created for youth empowerment, engagement and employment

OVI 1.1: By March 2025, PYEEEP pathways for the pilot countries tested and documented. (HRSD BP 2.2.1/ 4.1.3)

OVI 2: On demand, documentation and/or knowledge products is available to inform possible project scale up for the Pacific region. (HRSD BP 2.2.1/ 4.1.3)

PYEEEP has successfully designed, tested, and documented four pilot pathways confirming achievement of OVI 1.1. Both the desk review and KIIs with youth, families, and employers verified that these pathways were not only implemented but also adapted to local contexts, with youth reporting improved confidence and employability and employers rating their intention to continue engaging with the program. National validation workshops further tailored the pathways to country needs, lending legitimacy to their testing process.

The desk review found that the effectiveness of pathway delivery was enhanced through SPC-led training and mentoring for TVET instructors on human rights, inclusion, and psychosocial support, which equipped partner institutions to respond to diverse learner needs. However, it is worth noting that participating institutions (TTI, ATI, MMDC, KRTC) did not cite these as key contributors to quality. This may reflect that the support was embedded within broader program coordination and curriculum design rather than framed as formal training.

Progress on OVI 2 has been achieved but would benefit from stronger employer data. Knowledge products were developed, including blogs, Results Summary Sheets, case studies, and “stories of change” collected through KIIs and family interviews, which provide illustrative evidence of impact. However, partners noted gaps in systematic documentation, particularly regarding employer demand data and private sector feedback, and SPC staff highlighted the need for stronger structured knowledge management to support scale-up. While the foundations for knowledge sharing exist, employer perception surveys, tracer data, and lessons learned will be essential for these products to fully inform future adaptation and replication across the Pacific region.

Medium-term Outcome 2: Governments lead, resource, coordinate and implement national youth pathways programmes

OVI 2.1: By end of the project, two participating governments lead, coordinate, mobilise resources and/or implement agreed national youth ‘pathways’ programme. (HRSD BP 1.1.5)

OVI 2.2: By June 2023, governments in pilot countries lead the conduct of review of national policies, programs and services for Youth NEET engagement, employment, and empowerment. (HRSD BP 1.1.3/ 1.1.4)

OVI 2.3: By end of project, national budget allocation for Youth NEET sector in the pilot countries has increased by at least 15% from fiscal year 2023 baseline.

OVI 2.4: By end of project, at least one government led investment forum (or regional convening) conducted aimed to promote tested pathways and illicit support for investment in Youth NEET sector.

PYEEEP made notable progress in strengthening government leadership and coordination of youth pathways in both Tonga and Solomon Islands. By 2023, ministries in each country had stepped into visible

coordination roles through new National Steering Committees and Technical Working Groups. These bodies co-designed training pathways, and endorsed programme implementation. In Solomon Islands, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) was an active partner in participant selection and rollout, while in Tonga the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) also led participant selection and supported integration with national employment and youth priorities. Evidence of government ownership is further reflected in in-kind contributions such as staff time, office space, and coordination, with early signals of domestic co-financing beginning to emerge in Solomon Islands.

Both governments also led reviews of youth policy and service delivery in 2023, fulfilling OVI 2.2. The Validation workshops in Honiara and Nuku'alofa were not box-ticking exercises; they brought together officials, youth, and training providers to examine the state of national youth engagement and inform pathway design. These reviews highlighted the need for diversified training options, stronger parental support, rural outreach, and better coordination across ministries and training institutions. The process was government-led and demonstrated responsiveness to youth and labour market needs.

Since PYEEEP's inception, there are signs of incremental policy and systems shifts at both national and regional levels that align with the programme's objectives and may have been influenced by SPC's ongoing advocacy and the visibility of PYEEEP results. Regionally, the 2024 Senior Officials Meeting and Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting (PMYM) endorsed several governance and policy directions that mirror PYEEEP's model. Most notably the development of a ten-year Pacific Youth Development Pathway and a new Regional Youth Governance Mechanism to strengthen oversight and accountability for youth development across Pacific Island Countries. These outcomes emerged in the same forums where PYEEEP graduates and SPC staff presented evidence and testimonies from the pilot, suggesting a credible contribution to renewed regional commitment and policy alignment around youth pathways.

At the country level, the Solomon Islands has commenced a mid-term review of its National Youth Policy (2017–2030), and Tonga has advanced new employment and apprenticeship policies that emphasise youth training and transition to work. While these initiatives cannot be attributed solely to PYEEEP, they demonstrate a wider policy momentum and systems response consistent with the programme's advocacy on inclusive youth pathways and coordinated governance. Taken together, the evidence points to PYEEEP and SPC having contributed to an enabling environment in which governments and regional actors are re-prioritising youth employment, participation, and empowerment within formal policy frameworks.

Case Study 1. From Training Room to Policy Table: Youth Voices in National Decision-Making

For the first time, youth representatives trained through PYEEEP sat alongside government officials in national steering committees. Sela*, a graduate from Tonga's hospitality pathway, described the experience: "At first I was nervous. But I realised our voices mattered. We could say what youth need, and leaders listened."

In Solomon Islands, James*, an electrical trainee, was invited to present at the National Steering Committee. "I told them youth want more pathways like carpentry and agriculture. It was scary, but I felt proud."

Officials also noticed. A Ministry of Youth staffer said: "*The presence of young people changed the tone of meetings. It reminded us that policies are about real lives.*"

Regional visibility amplified these voices. PYEEEP graduates spoke at the 2024 Senior Officials Meeting and Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting, where leaders acknowledged their perspectives. One participant reflected: "*I never thought I would be speaking to ministers. Now I know my voice can make change.*"

These experiences show PYEEEP's system-level change: youth not only gaining skills but shaping the policies and institutions that affect them.

The indicator on fiscal resourcing (OVI 2.3) was removed in 2023 with program documents citing that this was not a targeted or realistic outcome given the short timeframe of the initial pilot. This evaluation also found that “ownership” is being expressed less through financial lines and more through coordination, in-kind support, and policy leadership. It’s an understandable pattern for small island states with tight fiscal space, but it also highlights the challenge of embedding PYEEEP within long-term national financing frameworks.

However, in **Solomon Islands**, there are early signals of government investment. The MWYCFA has demonstrated co-leadership of the pathways through its role in the National Steering Committee and through provision of staff and operational resources. Sensemaking discussions in 2025 noted “early domestic contributions” beginning to emerge, which suggests movement toward co-financing arrangements. Solomon Islands’ very high applicant demand (over 1,600 applications for 60 places) has also generated political pressure to expand pathways, which may incentivise greater government investment in future budgets.

In **Tonga**, the Ministry of Internal Affairs actively supported coordination and participant selection but has not yet signalled increased domestic funding for NEET youth. The desk review and stakeholder interviews emphasised that technical assistance and co-financing agreements would be required before the government could absorb PYEEEP pathways into national systems. During the 2023–24 validation workshops, officials highlighted priorities such as increasing stipends, expanding rural outreach, and investing in entrepreneurship support, with none yet reflected in national budgets.

On advocacy and investment mobilisation (OVI 2.4), PYEEEP successfully positioned youth pathways within regional policy fora. PYEEEP successfully brought youth pathways into the policy spotlight. It was featured at the 2024 Senior Officials and Pacific Ministers for Youth Meetings, where governments endorsed its relevance and early progress.

The Pacific Youth Council also helped to spark conversation on pathway investment needs. Still, it’s worth noting that SPC played a heavy facilitation role in these events, so the extent of genuine government leadership is mixed. Nevertheless, they provided important visibility and opened opportunities for peer learning, political support, and potential resourcing. SPC representatives have also reported increased regional visibility for PYEEEP, including invitations to share lessons in youth employment and skills fora.

Taken together the evidence points to real, if uneven, progress. Governments in both pilot countries are showing strong leadership and coordination of PYEEEP youth pathways, though fiscal commitment remains limited. Overall, the outcome can be considered on track for a pilot program. Governments are engaged and leading coordination, but resource mobilisation and budget commitments remain the weakest dimension of this outcome.

Medium-term Outcome 3: Youth NEET are empowered and have opportunity to benefit from pathways to employment

OVI 3.1: At least 15% of the trained Youth NEET are empowered benefiting from increased knowledge of and confidence in workplace opportunities and readiness, and/or ultimately gained employment or self-employed. (HRSD BP 2.3.2)

OVI 3.2: Stories of change where marginalised groups or individuals participate in and/or influence decision making. (HRSD BP 1.2.2)

OVI 3.3: At the end of project, increased demand for trained Youth NEET by 20% from baseline. (HRSD BP 2.2.1)

Empowerment gains were consistently reported across multiple domains. A survey of female youth from Cohort 2 showed strong agreement (average 4.4/5) that participants were “better at managing stress” and “more prepared for the future” (average 4.7/5). These quantitative results were reinforced by qualitative insights from KIIs. A Solomon Islands graduate described feeling “able to stand on my own two feet,” while a

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Tongan participant explained she was now “more confident... contributing financially at home.” These stories show that empowerment was experienced both personally via greater self-confidence, improved wellbeing, clearer life direction, and socially through the contribution to household expenses.

Confidence emerged as one of the most consistent threads in Youth NEET stories. Many entered PYEEEP with little or no work experience, describing themselves as “left behind” or even “useless” before joining. The structure of the program, training, internships, and the steady presence of mentors, began to shift that narrative. Participants spoke about finding their voice by learning how to speak up in class, hold a conversation with an employer, or picture themselves in a job they once thought out of reach. One young person called PYEEEP “a second chance to dream,” a phrase that seems to capture the restoration of confidence and agency felt by many. Families spoke of sons and daughters who were “more mature, responsible, and disciplined,” and several remarked that their children were now setting goals and taking part in family decision-making.

Leadership outcomes were also evident and went beyond the workplace. Several youth reported taking on peer mentoring roles, assisting classmates with assignments or supporting others through stress. This peer-to-peer leadership was complemented by opportunities for civic participation. Graduates were invited to speak at the SOM and the PMYM, forums where youth voices are rarely heard. These moments of visibility mattered for both the individuals involved and the broader framing of youth NEET, shifting perceptions from dependents to active citizens. This empowerment is significant in the Pacific context, where youth NEET are often described as “discouraged workers” with low confidence in formal labour markets³. By easing financial pressures and integrating psychosocial and pastoral care, PYEEEP made it easier for participants to show up, stay engaged, and rebuild belief in themselves.

PYEEEP demonstrated early success in strengthening youth employability and positive transitions into employment and livelihoods. Training pathways produced recognised qualifications and internships providing real-world exposure. Employers described participants as confident and disciplined noting that “students have become part of the team.” This is consistent with wider Pacific evidence showing that work-integrated learning and employer placements significantly increase youth employment prospects in small labour markets⁴. By embedding structured internships and employer feedback loops, PYEEEP provided participants not just with technical skills but also with employability assets such as punctuality, teamwork, and customer service.

A total of thirty-one youth engaged in PYEEEP were interviewed for this evaluation, 13 of which were graduates from Cohort 1. Of these 13, 10 reported being in paid work (two in self-employment) one year after completing the program. While this sample is not representative, it aligns with program monitoring data reported in the 2023 Activity Monitoring Assessment suggesting that by December 2024 at least 25% of total Cohort 1 (62 students) had received offers for ongoing paid work by host employers after internships, and others continued into further TVET qualifications.

In Solomon Islands, several graduates pursued microbusiness in textiles, catering, or tapa printing. These are pathways that resonate with the country’s large informal economy, where around 75% of workers are outside the formal wage sector.⁵

In Tonga, many young people expressed aspirations for overseas aged-care employment, reflecting awareness of regional labour mobility schemes such as New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) program and Australia’s Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. These opportunities are an established part of the Pacific labour landscape, and the program should remain mindful of how they shape youth expectations and choices. Being open and transparent with participants about both domestic and

³ Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2022). *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2022*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2023). *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2023: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People*. Geneva: ILO

⁵ World Bank (2024). *Solomon Islands Economic Update: Harnessing Inclusive Growth from the Informal Economy*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

regional employment pathways can help manage aspirations and ensure that PYEEEP's training continues to support informed, realistic decision-making.

Case Study 2. From Interns to Employees: How Pacific Businesses Saw Youth Potential

When the Tanoa Dateline Hotel first accepted PYEEEP interns in Tonga, supervisors were unsure what to expect. "We worried they might not be ready for the workplace," admitted one manager.

Those doubts soon disappeared. Staff were impressed by the interns' professionalism, teamwork, and eagerness to learn. Several were offered jobs immediately after their internships. "The students have become part of the team. We would welcome them again," the manager said.

In Solomon Islands, Solomon Ports echoed the same experience. One supervisor explained: "*We saw these young people grow in front of us. They came in shy, but by the end they were confident and reliable.*"

A small catering company in Honiara, which hosted two PYEEEP participants, also reported benefits: "*The PYEEEP trainees knew how to budget and prepare menus. They saved us time, and we learned from them too — they came in with good ideas.*"

Employers' attitudes began to shift. A Chamber of Commerce representative reflected: "*Businesses used to see NEET youth as risky. Now they see them as assets, especially after internships.*"

These stories show how internships acted as a bridge — not only between training and jobs, but also between perception and reality, transforming how employers see Pacific youth.

Wrap-around supports were decisive in enabling vulnerable youth to complete the program. Youth consistently reported that allowances, transport stipends, uniforms, boarding, and psychosocial counselling made the difference between dropping out and continuing, with one Tongan participant describing the support as a lifeline: "*It really helped... when stressed I needed someone to talk to*". These supports lowered barriers that typically prevent NEET youth from sustaining participation in training, particularly those with financial or caregiving responsibilities.

Families reinforced this, noting that without subsidised food and transport, participation would not have been possible, and some even described savings on household costs when youth were accommodated in boarding facilities. Employers also observed that interns with such supports were more consistent and reliable in attendance.

Conversely, those who dropped out of the program most often cited lack of transport or financial stress as decisive factors, underscoring the importance of these interventions. Partners and SPC staff described wraparounds as "not add-ons, but essential enablers," and external evidence from Pacific TVET studies confirms that in contexts where nearly 30% of Tongan youth are NEET and most Solomon Islands youth rely on informal subsistence work, financial and pastoral supports are critical for retention. In this sense, PYEEEP's package of allowances, counselling, and practical enablers was not peripheral but central to the program's effectiveness, directly addressing the structural barriers that disproportionately affect young women, rural youth, and young parents.

Case Study 3. Balancing Care and Careers: How PYEEEP Supported Young Mothers in Tonga

When Mele* first joined the aged-care training at Tupou Tertiary Institute, she was juggling the demands of caring for her two small children. “I wanted to study, but my baby was only a year old. I thought I would have to give up again,” she explained.

Through PYEEEP, she was able to access childcare subsidies and flexible scheduling. This meant she could attend classes during the day while her children were cared for safely. When her family situation changed, the program allowed her to pause and later re-join her training.

Her determination paid off. Mele completed her internship at a local aged-care facility, where staff praised her compassion and professionalism. “Now I feel I can support my family and also serve my community,” she said.

She is not alone. Another young mother, Ana*, described how she could not have enrolled without childcare support: “The stipend for my baby’s care was the only way. My family could not help, but the program made it possible.”

Even young men faced care burdens. Sione* balanced training with caring for his grandmother. “Before PYEEEP I stayed home most days. The stipend helped me pay for transport, and my aunty helped with grandma while I trained.”

As one training coordinator put it: *“Without these supports, many would have dropped out. It’s not a luxury — it’s what makes completion possible.”*

These stories show that for vulnerable youth, wrap-around supports are not side benefits but essential enablers of participation and success.

MELKMC Outcomes & Indicators

The following table summarises progress against PYEEEP's MELKMC short- and medium-term outcomes related to effectiveness.

Outcome Level	OVI / Indicator	Target	Progress Assessment
Medium-term Outcome 1: Pathways created for youth empowerment, engagement and employment	OVI 1.1: By March 2025, PYEEEP pathways for the pilot countries tested and documented. (HRSD BP 2.2.1/ 4.1.3)	Design and delivery of 4 contextualised pathways in 2 PICs	Achieved – Four pathways delivered (TTI aged care, ATI hospitality, KRTC electrical, MMDC textiles/life skills); endorsed by NSCs/TWGs.
	OVI 2: On demand, documentation and/or knowledge products is available to inform possible project scale up for the Pacific region. (HRSD BP 2.2.1/ 4.1.3)	Knowledge products prepared	Achieved – Case studies, blogs, and Results Sheets exist. This evaluation also contributes to this indicator. More systematic employer demand data is still missing
Medium-term Outcome 2: Governments lead, resource, coordinate and implement national youth pathways programmes	OVI 2.1: By end of the project, two participating governments lead, coordinate, mobilise resources and/or implement agreed national youth 'pathways' programme. (HRSD BP 1.1.5)	Governments lead and resource	On track – NSCs/TWGs established and functioning, ministries engaged in design and delivery. Noting some inconsistent TWG functionality and no evidence yet of significant financial resourcing.
	OVI 2.2: By June 2023, governments in pilot countries lead the conduct of review of national policies, programs and services for Youth NEET engagement, employment, and empowerment. (HRSD BP 1.1.3/ 1.1.4)	Policy/program reviews conducted	Achieved – Reviews completed in both countries by mid-2023.
	OVI 2.3: By end of project, national budget allocation for Youth NEET sector in the pilot countries has increased by at least 15% from fiscal year 2023 baseline.	+15% budget increase	Removed⁶ – No baseline established. SPC staff confirm this was not monitored as unrealistic for the pilot stage.
	OVI 2.4: By end of project, at least one government led investment forum (or regional convening) conducted aimed to promote tested pathways and illicit support for investment in Youth NEET sector.	1+ convening	On track – Pacific Youth Council Convening in 2024 held with SPC support, but evidence is mixed on whether this was fully government-led.
Medium-term Outcome 3: Youth NEET are empowered and have opportunity to benefit from pathways to employment	OVI 3.1: At least 15% of the trained Youth NEET are empowered benefiting from increased knowledge of and confidence in workplace opportunities and readiness, and/or ultimately gained employment or self-employed. (HRSD BP 2.3.2)	15% employment / readiness	Achieved – Youth Survey (n=18) shows high confidence and preparedness; KIIs of Cohort 1 confirm 10 out of 13 interviewed graduates in work or self-employment. Even if not representative, this surpasses the 15% target.
	OVI 3.2: Stories of change where marginalised groups or individuals participate in and/or influence decision making. (HRSD BP 1.2.2)	Stories captured	Achieved – KIIs and blogs capture multiple stories (e.g., women at MMDC, youth with disability linkages, young mothers). Families also describe youth influencing household decisions.
	OVI 3.3: At the end of project, increased demand for trained Youth NEET by 20% from baseline. (HRSD BP 2.2.1)	+20% demand	On Track – All hosts expressed willingness to re-engage with the program. All hosts said they would hire interns. No formal sectoral employer survey or baseline exists. Small sample size.

⁶ The removal of this indicator was carried out in consultation with MFAT, Steering Committees and RAG.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

PYEEEP is demonstrating gender- and disability-sensitive programming and has embedded GEDSI intent throughout its design and delivery. This alignment is consistent with SPC and MFAT policy priorities and the program's rights-based approach. Across both pilot countries, five students participating in PYEEEP identified as having a disability, two in Tonga and three in Solomon Islands. In addition, one project partner was identified as having a disability or specific accessibility needs.

As is typical for a pilot, evidence of comprehensive implementation and outcomes remains partial, consisting largely of individual examples. Nevertheless, systematic gender-responsive activities are evident. For instance, the women-only MMDC stream has created a safe entry point for young women, and childcare subsidies have enabled parents, including fathers, to continue their studies. Stakeholders also noted the value of integrating human rights and gender training alongside technical course content, observing positive effects on both institutions and students.

Desk review findings confirm PYEEEP's efforts to accommodate vulnerable youth, particularly young mothers and those with disabilities. The program provided specific forms of support including childcare subsidies and flexible participation. One notable example highlighted in the SPC blog involves a young mother who was allowed to defer her training to care for her child, rejoining when her personal circumstances improved. This flexibility helped reduce dropout risk and reinforced the program's commitment to inclusive participation.

Additionally, the program engaged with other programs within HRSD Division to enhance disability inclusion. According to the 2024 Annual Report, this partnership aimed to ensure training facilities and materials were accessible, and that inclusion principles were embedded across the pathways, particularly in aged care. However, these efforts are more frequently described as aspirational or preparatory; concrete results, such as feedback on their experience, remain undocumented.

Interviews and sense-making workshops with students, members of the steering committees and technical working groups illustrated the importance of providing inclusive opportunities for NEET youth to participate in PYEEEP. Examples were given of the gender role reversals (men in aged care, women in electrical pathways), transportation support for students with a disability and creating a more enabling environment for transgender students through facilitated discussion with institutions on using preferred names and pronouns. The wrap around support for single parents, both mothers and fathers, was consistently highlighted by program stakeholders as a positive example of inclusion and gender-responsive programming. These individual testimonies are compelling and demonstrate the potential impact a future, scaled up PYEEEP could have on the lives of young parents should this type of support be sustained.

In terms of the policy environment for the program, the evaluation notes the HRSD Objectives include a commitment to equality and social inclusion, "*mobilise, empower and build conditions for gender equality and social inclusion in society and development*". The HRSD takes a people centred approach as a strategy to deliver technical assistance and services and embeds this throughout the program planning, implementation, management, monitoring and reporting cycle. As noted in the introduction, a set of guiding principles, '*PLANET*,' includes non-discrimination and inclusion ('N'), empowerment and equality ('E') and transforming social norms ('T'). New Zealand's [International Cooperation for Effective Sustainable Development Policy](#) affirms gender equality and women's empowerment as a priority for development cooperation in the Pacific.

While explicit references to disability equity and other forms of social inclusion are limited in HRSD's high-level policy documents, disability inclusion is considered in PYEEEP's planning and partially reflected in delivery. The *Profiling Reports* for Tonga and Solomon Islands describe the inclusive processes adopted,

such as accessible training environments, engagement of youth with disabilities, and emphasis on equitable participation and recommend continued strengthening of these measures. Although GEDSI is embedded throughout PYEEEP, it is not articulated as a distinct outcome within the program's results framework. Given the program's focus on NEET youth, this implicit approach is understandable; however, it risks underemphasising the intersectional vulnerabilities such as gender, disability, and caregiving roles that shape participation. While PYEEEP's MELKMC system captures qualitative "stories of change," it does not report GEDSI as a standalone outcome area. The HRSD data capture tools do allow and require disaggregation by gender, disability, and other relevant characteristics, and this information is collected through partner reporting. However, these data are not consistently analysed or presented in performance reports, meaning the extent of inclusion outcomes remains only partially visible. Sensitivity considerations, particularly in relation to gender identity and disability in small communities, also influence how such data are handled and disclosed.

SPC staff acknowledged that this embedded approach, while practical, may have led to a lower strategic profile for GEDSI, being intrinsic to everything they do here than explicitly tracked. It is also important to recognise that the program operates within sensitive gender and cultural contexts, particularly in Tonga, where social norms influence how equality and inclusion are understood and enacted.

While these examples are encouraging, several areas could be strengthened. More proactive outreach to disabled youth, tailored coaching or psychosocial support, and stronger monitoring of participation and satisfaction among vulnerable groups would provide clearer insight into the program's equity outcomes. Integrating intersectional data analysis, reporting results by gender, disability status, and caregiving roles, would also enable better evaluation of how well the program meets the needs of its most vulnerable participants. As the model evolves, documenting GEDSI objectives and achievements more explicitly will reinforce the strong foundation established during this pilot phase.

Case Study 4. Skills Without Barriers: Disability-Inclusive Training in Solomon Islands

For Joseph*, a young man with a hearing impairment, doors to training and employment had always felt closed. That changed when PYEEEP partnered with Kaotave Rural Training Centre and San Isidro to adapt carpentry training for youth like him.

Sign language interpreters were introduced, teachers received disability-inclusive training, and peers were sensitised. "At first I was shy. But my classmates learned to work with me, and I learned to work with them," Joseph said with a smile.

By graduation, he was making furniture and had secured casual work with a local builder. His confidence soared: "Now I know I can provide for myself."

Maria*, a young woman with limited mobility, joined the textiles course at MMDC. She spoke about how teachers adjusted classroom layouts and peers helped with lifting heavy materials. "I thought my body would hold me back. But now I sew uniforms for neighbours," she explained.

An instructor reflected: *"It opened our eyes. Inclusion is not about charity — it's about adapting the system so everyone learns."*

These examples highlight that inclusion is both possible and practical when training institutions commit to it. PYEEEP's small but deliberate efforts showed how Pacific youth with disabilities can thrive when barriers are removed.

Challenges

Despite the demonstrable positive outcomes, there were areas where effectiveness was weaker. Employers noted gaps in practical readiness, suggesting more pre-placement preparation was needed. Some supervisors had little awareness of PYEEEP itself, limiting their ability to support participants effectively during internships. In Tonga, family caregiving duties limited job uptake even when graduates had relevant skills, highlighting the need for stronger links to care-economy policy and services. Entrepreneurship was considered within PYEEEP's design but was not a central focus of its outcomes, even though informal work and self-employment remain the dominant livelihood sources across the Pacific sub-region.. With the formal economy unable to absorb the demand for jobs, this represents a missed opportunity to align more closely with national priorities that emphasise supporting youth as business owners.

The program also faced operational challenges that constrained effectiveness. PYEEEP was delivered by a small core team, and fragile staffing capacity meant that program officers were stretched across multiple responsibilities. This sometimes slowed response times and increased the risk of burnout. The functionality of TWGs was inconsistent: some failed to reach quorum, and meeting allowances or logistics limited their ability to act as reliable oversight and coordination mechanisms. In addition, unforeseen risks required reactive problem-solving. In the Solomon Islands, for example, the closure of a boarding facility due to plumbing failures disrupted training delivery and forced improvised arrangements between SPC, training providers, and government.

These real-world disruptions mirror challenges documented in TVET systems elsewhere in the Pacific. The World Bank's Building Better Formal TVET Systems highlights how weak governance arrangements, limited staff capacity and fragmented institutional mandates frequently lead to delays, underutilised facilities, and coordination breakdowns in skill development programs⁷. These incidents underline the importance of investing not only in pathways and supports for youth, but also in stronger institutional systems, infrastructure, and staffing to safeguard the quality and continuity of delivery.

3.3 VALUE FOR MONEY (EFFICIENCY)

3

PYEEEP converted relatively high per-youth investment into strong completion rates and early employment outcomes, showing that intensive wraparound supports, though small, delivered disproportionate value for retention and inclusion. Efficiency is expected to improve across larger cohorts, co-financing, and pathway efficiencies.

Economy

Economy relates to whether resources were procured and used at reasonable cost for the quality achieved. PYEEEP was funded at NZD 2.4 million (2022–2025), with NZD 1.8 million initially dispersed and approximately 40% spent by end-2024. Underspend stemmed from a slower-than-anticipated inception phase and COVID-19 recovery disruptions, which reduced travel, regional convening, and in-person training costs. Additional savings were realised when several internships were hosted on a cost-free basis by employers and when in-kind contributions such as staff time, facilities, and coordination support were provided by SPC and partner institutions, lowering the program's direct financial outlay and ensuring donor funds stretched further

Direct training costs were broadly in line with Pacific TVET benchmarks. An MFAT evaluation of NZ in-country awards estimated the annual cost to train a TVET student in Tonga at TOP 2,400–3,000 per head

⁷ World Bank, 2021. *Building Better Formal TVET Systems: Principles and Practice in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/skillsdevelopment/publication/better-technical-vocational-education-training-TVET>

(NZD 1800-2,265), noting government subsidies keep tuition lower at public providers⁸. The University of the South Pacific TAFE publishes per-course fees (e.g., Tonga TOP 285–300 per pre-degree course), showing typical price levels for pre-degree TVET-type study⁹.

While Solomon Islands Rural Training Centre's reviews and program documents cite RTC student fees at approximately SBD 4,000 per year (NZD 871) at some centres (e.g., Tabaka RTC)¹⁰. Solomon Islands National University certificate programs commonly sit around SBD 10,800 per year, with some block/competency fees listed for trades (e.g., Electrical Technology, Carpentry & Joinery) in the SBD 6,200–7,200 per block range (NZD 1,350-1,568)¹¹. APTC (regional TVET provider) lists qualification fees such as SBD 4,500 (Cert II Construction) and SBD 6,700 (Cert III Carpentry), these figures are not annual, but useful price signals¹².

PYEEEP's blended fees (approximately NZD \$817–\$961 per youth) are therefore consistent with low-to-mid range regional benchmarks, while stipends (approximately NZD \$814) were pegged to local minimum wage equivalents. Fixed costs (governance, MEL, staffing) are often higher during pilots (NZD \$5,000 per participant) but projections suggest these could fall with expanded cohorts.

Efficiency

PYEEEP's efficiency can be understood in terms of how well it has converted financial, institutional, and human resources into outputs and early outcomes for youth NEET. The program was designed to cover two pilot countries, with relatively small cohorts (80 youth in Cohort 1 with 62 completing; 77.5%) to allow for intensive piloting and learning. Pathways vary in duration: from 36 weeks at MMDC (life skills, textiles, catering) to 52 weeks at TTI (aged care). By Dec 2024, 62 youth completed the full pathway (32 Solomon Is, 30 Tonga). At least 20 students secured paid work offers by end-2024

To estimate the cost per youth, expenditure was divided by the number of participants:

- Total project spend to end-2024: NZD 806,237.
- Total youth enrolled (Cohort 1): 80.
- Cost per enrolled youth: NZD 10,078.
- Graduated youth (completed full pathway by 2024): 62.
- Cost per graduate: NZD 13,003.

Financial data shows that while the expected unit cost per youth was approximately NZD 10,078, the actual unit cost per graduate rose to ~NZD 13,003 due to attrition and underspend on variable lines (e.g., travel, regional convening). When mapped against job outcomes, the effective cost per employed youth is higher. These figures are high compared to mainstream TVET, but they reflect the program's deliberate investment in intensive wraparound supports and governance, key to achieving retention.

Actual Expenditure

The table below summarises PYEEEP's actual expenditure against budget for 2023 and 2024, highlighting both annual spend and cumulative execution rates over the life of the project to date.

2023: Annual spend: NZD 358,694 (against NZD 964,273 budget; 37% execution)

Cumulative spend to end-2023: NZD 362,064 (30% execution against total budget)

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ) (2017) Review of the New Zealand In-country Awards: Tonga Evaluation. Wellington: MFAT.

⁹ University of the South Pacific (2025) *2025 Fees Pacific Technical and Further Education – Pre-Degree and Skills Programmes*. Suva: USP.

¹⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) (2018) Solomon Islands Skills for Economic Growth (S4EG) — Independent Review Report. Honiara: DFAT.

¹¹ Solomon Islands National University (2025) *2025 Fee Schedule*. Honiara: SINU.

¹² Australia Pacific Training Coalition (2024) *Course Fees*.

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2024: Annual spend: NZD 444,173 (against NZD 844,266 budget; 53% execution)

Cumulative spend to end-2024: NZD 806,237 (40% execution against total budget)

An assessment of training institution costs provides insight into the direct financial resources required to deliver each pathway, offering a basis for comparison across institutions and countries.

Institution	Cost per cohort	Wraparound Support	Notes
MMDC (Solomon Is)	278,850 SBD	220,000 SBD stipends + 10,000 SBD pastoral (in-kind additional)	Excludes internship allowance/work readiness stipends
KRTC (Solomon Is)	276,100 SBD	60,000 SBD boarding costs + 45,000 SBD pastoral + additional transport subsidy (no stipends).	Boarding/transport covered instead of stipends
ATI (Tonga)	290,739 TOP	231,000 TOP stipends + 22,000 TOP pastoral.	Includes stipends for ATI/TTI work readiness
TTI (Tonga)	305,492 TOP	193,200 TOP stipends + 9,520 TOP pastoral (in-kind additional)	Full cost per youth incl. stipends, fees, wraparound

Similarly, standardising costs into NZD enables a consistent comparison across institutions and countries. The per-youth figures, based on one full cohort of approximately 20 students per pathway, highlight relative differences in delivery costs and provide a clear benchmark for assessing efficiency and equity across the model.

Institution	Total Cost (NZD)	Cost per Youth (NZD)
MMDC (Solomon Is)	\$50,193	\$2,510
KRTC (Solomon Is)	\$49,698	\$2,485
ATI (Tonga)	\$203,517	\$10,176
TTI (Tonga)	\$213,844	\$10,692

Key Insights

- Tonga pathways are significantly more expensive compared to Solomon Islands pathways.
- The difference is largely due to higher training/stipend costs in Tonga and the inclusion of more comprehensive wraparound support.

Reconciling per-institution training costs with total project expenditure (to end-2024, NZD 806,237), provides a clear picture of how resources are allocated. This breakdown distinguishes the share of funding directed to frontline training delivery versus broader enabling functions such as MEL, stakeholder engagement, governance, and SPC coordination.

Category	Amount (NZD)	% of Total
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Institution Training Costs (all 4 pathways)	\$517,253	64.2%
Other Costs (MEL, youth engagement, governance, SPC overheads)	\$288,984	35.8%
Total Project Spend (to 2024)	\$806,237	100%

Around two-thirds of PYEEEP’s budget (64%) goes directly to the institutions, covering tuition, stipends, wraparound support, teaching, materials, boarding, and internships. The remaining 36% is absorbed by MEL activities, youth engagement (retreats, graduations, stakeholder meetings), governance structures (RAG, NSC, TWG), SPC coordination, and overheads. This balance shows a relatively efficient model where most resources directly benefit youth training and support, but with a significant enabling cost structure to ensure sustainability and evidence capture.

KIs highlighted both strengths and tensions in efficiency. Training providers noted that stipends and transport allowances were “the only reason some young people could attend every day,” underlining the importance of small but catalytic equity spend. Employers emphasised the efficiency of the internship model, with one stating that “the placements cost us little but gave us a chance to hire with confidence.” Conversely, interviews suggested that the strain in managing multiple governance platforms with a small team reduced operational efficiency and highlighted the need for streamlining.

Efficiency gains were observed where curricula could be reused (e.g., hospitality training at ATI) and where Chambers of Commerce brokered internships, reducing transaction costs. Higher costs were associated with capital-intensive trades such as KRTC’s electrical program, which required equipment and boarding. Forward projections confirm that efficiency improves under scale, with unit costs halving in scenarios that reuse curricula and spread fixed costs across larger cohorts.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness in VfM terms asks whether inputs delivered the intended outcomes. While costs per participant are high, PYEEEP delivered a strong completion rate, improved technical and soft skills, and employment or further training outcomes. Non-monetised benefits included increased confidence, leadership, and household contributions. Guardians in KIs described graduates as “helping pay bills” and “setting an example for siblings,” indicating broader social returns.

Employers, once hesitant, reported greater willingness to host or hire youth NEET after seeing their performance firsthand. Governments in both countries began integrating pathway lessons into policy, suggesting system-level effectiveness despite small numbers. The main caveat lies in employment conversion such that until more participants transition into sustained jobs, and data on retention and wages is available, the program’s “cost per sustainable job” will remain on the higher side.

Equity

Equity asks whether benefits are fairly distributed and whether marginalised groups are reached. In this respect, PYEEEP stands out. The program deliberately targeted women, single mothers, rural youth, and young people with disabilities—groups often excluded from formal training. Targeted supports such as childcare subsidies (NZD 10,000 in Tonga; NZD 2,000 in Solomon Islands), psychosocial services (NZD 10,000 per country), and assistance with transport and boarding were modest in cost but decisive for retention. Although per-participant costs exceeded those of mainstream TVET, these measures made participation possible for youth who would otherwise be left out, generating disproportionate social returns. Stakeholder reflections at the September 2025 sensemaking workshop stressed that while the model

appears resource-intensive, the depth of support was necessary to demonstrate proof of concept and to address the structural barriers faced by youth NEET.

The program also somewhat disrupted gender norms. For example, women entered electrical trades at KRTC, and men trained in aged care at TTI. The MMDC women-only pathway created a safe entry point for young mothers. This approach aligns with MFAT's broader understanding of Value for Money, which weighs social impact alongside economic efficiency. As one youth leader in Tonga put it, the subsidies were "the difference between dropping out and finishing," and training providers noted that these shifts in participation were already reshaping expectations about what young men and women can do.

Nevertheless, equity data remains incomplete. Evidence on disability inclusion and outcomes is primarily qualitative, drawn from partner reports and profiling exercises rather than systematic monitoring. Rural outreach continues to be costly compared with urban delivery, and without ring-fenced funding to sustain childcare, transport, and counselling supports, there is a real risk that equity measures will be diluted as the program expands.

Comparative Value

PYEEEP's cost profile sits in the middle ground between large-scale regional models and lean national TVET provision.

A useful comparison is **Tonga's Skills and Employment Tonga (SET)** program¹³, which channels TVET Student Support Funds (TSSF) through existing institutions to subsidise tuition, transport, and allowances for disadvantaged learners. Because TSSF is embedded in a national program (rather than a standalone youth employment scheme), it is much leaner than PYEEEP in structure and intent and lacks PYEEEP's wrap-around services and employer linkage components. But it illustrates how lower-cost subsidy interventions can be folded into a broader national TVET system.

Similarly, the **Solomon Islands Internship Training Program (SIITP)**¹⁴ offers a lighter, public-sector-focused model combining a bridging program (12 months) and an internship program (2 years) for newly graduated professionals. Its supervision and placement costs are lower, but it does not target NEET youth or include psychosocial or livelihood supports. The DFAT independent review of SIITP noted challenges around sustainability, mentor capacity, geographical reach, and the cost of supervision.

Other donor-funded youth employment programs provide useful benchmarks. The **World Bank's Youth Employment Project in PNG** reported costs of approximately NZD \$4,280 (USD 2,500) per participant for short-term skills and work placements, far below PYEEEP, but delivered more limited outcomes (short-term income generation without systemic pathways). Similarly, **Fiji's TVET strengthening reforms**, supported by DFAT and ADB, emphasised institutional capacity building rather than wraparound supports, keeping costs down but offering less direct equity impact.

The **Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC)**¹⁵, which delivered accredited Australian qualifications across several Pacific countries, was found to have per-student costs more than double those of national providers.

By comparison, PYEEEP's unit costs per enrolled youth (NZD 13,003) are high relative to national RTC benchmarks (Solomon Islands at NZD 520–720 per student annually; Tonga approximately NZD 950), but significantly lower than APTC.

¹³ Government of Tonga & ADB (2024) *Aide Mémoire: Skills and Employment Tonga (SET) – Mission 18–22 March 2024*. Nuku'alofa: Ministry of Internal Affairs.

¹⁴ DFAT (2021) *Solomon Islands Internship Training Program (SIITP): Independent Review Report and Management Response*. Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¹⁵ DFAT (2018) *Independent Review of the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) Stage III*. Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

PYEEEP therefore represents a “high-support, medium-cost” model. While its per-youth costs exceed those of conventional national TVET programmes, they reflect deliberate investments in wrap-around supports that are essential for retaining and empowering NEET youth. These costs remain substantially lower than regional export-oriented schemes like APTC and are expected to decrease as the model is scaled and integrated into existing national systems. The actual cost per graduate and per employed youth appear expensive at pilot scale, largely because fixed governance and operational costs were spread across small cohorts and an intensive design and training (service providers) process. However, the program has demonstrated prudent use of funds, with cost savings from in-kind contributions and cost-free internships. Efficiency gains are already evident where curricula were reused, equity supports kept dropouts low, and chambers brokered internships at little additional cost. Crucially, PYEEEP’s holistic design (stipends, psychosocial services, childcare, governance mechanisms) directly addresses structural barriers that mainstream models overlook, producing disproportionately valuable retention and empowerment outcomes. The social returns on investment such as confidence, wellbeing, household contributions, and gender inclusion, are substantial but harder to quantify.

Despite clear progress, several information gaps constrain a comprehensive VfM assessment. A full appraisal of economic aspects would require disaggregated financial data by budget line such as cost for curriculum development, national profiling, MEL, governance or institutional costs, procurement records and a breakdown of SPC technical assistance. In addition, systematic disaggregation of expenditure and outcomes by gender, location, and disability status is needed to assess the equity dimension of VfM more robustly.

3.4 IMPACT

4

PYEEEP is changing perceptions: employers and TVET providers now see NEET youth as assets, and governments are moving from passive supporters to co-leaders. Evidence of intergenerational benefits—graduates’ success boosting family morale, financial contributions, and siblings’ education prospects.

PYEEEP has generated clear shifts in youth confidence, motivation, and workplace behaviours.

Across both pilot countries, participants described moving from passivity or discouragement to a sense of purpose and self-belief.

All the 31 interviewed youth expressed that they now feel more confident speaking up and trying new things. As one Solomon Islands graduate explained, “*Before PYEEEP I stayed home doing nothing; now I can talk to people and feel confident to apply for jobs.*” The majority shared that the program gave them courage, purpose, and a stronger belief in their own abilities.

Over four in five youth would recommend PYEEEP to others, describing it as a valuable source of support, skills development, and financial assistance. Youth from Cohort 1 also spoke about becoming more independent, with twelve of the thirteen noting they now have greater control over their lives and decisions.

Survey responses reinforced these findings. Nearly every female participant from Solomon Islands reported feeling confident or very confident about applying for jobs or further training, and most felt well prepared for the workplace. Every respondent said their wellbeing had improved through the program — “*Yes, really improve, change a lot.*” and “*Yes because I learn lots of skills so I feel happy.*” Thirteen participants described facing challenges linked to gender, disability, or caregiving responsibilities, while two said they had not encountered such barriers. Overall satisfaction with the program was universal, with one youth summarising, “*I’m very satisfied with that program. It help me a lot.*”

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These behavioural and attitudinal changes were reinforced by the program's wrap-around supports and mentoring. Counselling and pastoral care helped participants address anxiety, gender expectations, and family pressures, allowing sustained engagement. Several young women highlighted that the program *"taught us to believe we could do hard work like men"*, while young men in Tonga's aged care pathway reported a new respect for care work traditionally viewed as female.

Structured internships and the work readiness training modules also fostered significant gains in workplace preparedness. Graduates demonstrated improved financial literacy, understanding of employment rights, and job-search skills. Employers in hospitality, aged care, and trades noted better punctuality, responsibility, and professionalism compared with other entry-level recruits. PYEEEP trainees *"arrived already understanding workplace ethics and teamwork,"* suggesting the model successfully bridged school-to-work transitions.

The effects of these transformations extended beyond individuals to their families and communities.

Parents and caregivers frequently described pride, emotional relief, and renewed optimism as young people who had previously been disengaged began contributing financially and socially to their households. One parent noted, *"Before PYEEEP my daughter stayed home; now she is working and helping with the bills. It changed how we see her and how she sees herself."* For many households, these contributions represented the first time a young person who had previously been unemployed or disengaged was able to contribute economically to the household, creating what parents described as *"a big relief"* and *"a source of pride."* These livelihood impacts, while modest in scale, are highly significant in the Pacific context, where even small contributions can make a meaningful difference in cash-constrained households and where social expectations of reciprocity reinforce the value of youth as economic and social contributors.

Parents also noted that **participation in PYEEEP improved family dynamics and communication.** The confidence and discipline young people gained through structured training and internships translated into greater respect and responsibility at home. Families observed that youth were *"more patient," "helpful with younger siblings,"* and *"showed leadership in family decisions,"* particularly around budgeting and planning.

In Solomon Islands, family interviews linked these changes to improved household morale. Some parents said seeing their children succeed encouraged them to let younger siblings, especially girls, to pursue training. One Tongan father proudly shared that his daughter, previously shy and withdrawn, now advises her younger cousins to continue school and *"speaks up in family meetings."* One youth participant reported that her family had *"started saving together for the first time"* after she joined PYEEEP. Another parent explained that her son's participation had *"lifted the whole household,"* and that they were motivating friends to join the next PYEEEP cohort or join church leadership roles.

Communities also benefited from improved service delivery. Graduates from aged care and hospitality pathways filled local labour shortages, while electrical trade trainees assisted with community repairs and installations. In Solomon Islands, one family noted that their son's electrical skills allowed him to *"help wire neighbours' homes safely,"* earning small income while building community trust. Several graduates became informal mentors *"I tell others in my village that education is not finished when you leave school,"* said one KRTC participant.

Unintended effects were minimal but present. Of the interviewed youth, 30 (97%) described at least one challenge; most frequently financial hardship, transport, or family duties. Some families experienced short-term strain when trainees relocated for boarding or internships, especially single mothers balancing childcare. These were largely mitigated by stipends, transport support, and flexible attendance arrangements. No evidence of social backlash or stigma was reported, suggesting community attitudes toward NEET youth became more positive and respectful.

Case Study 5. One Youth, Four Lives Changed: How PYEEEP Strengthened Families

When Andrew* in Solomon Islands joined the electrical trade pathway, his family worried about the cost of training and transport. But with stipends and boarding provided, he could complete his studies and internship.

Now employed with a local company, Andrew not only supports himself but contributes to his household. “I help pay for rice, kerosene, and my sisters’ school fees,” he said. His mother added: “One child’s opportunity has lifted our whole family.”

In Tonga, a mother described her daughter’s transformation after graduating from hospitality: “*She has acquired leadership skills. She is working and supporting the family. We see her differently now — not a child, but someone who can stand on her own.*”

Another Solomon Islands parent said: “*Before, our son had no direction. Now he is paying bills and helping his siblings stay in school. The stress is less.*”

Several families mentioned pride as much as income. A father explained: “*It is not only the money. It is seeing our child stand on stage, graduate, wear the uniform. It gives us hope again.*”

This is the **multiplier effect** of PYEEEP — one youth’s opportunity often benefitted four or more relatives. As one father summarised: “*When my son stood tall, the whole family stood taller too.*”

Influence on Employers, Training Institutions, and Governments

PYEEEP has begun to shift systems-level perceptions and practices across employers, TVET institutions, and governments. Employers participating in internships reported a notable change in attitudes toward NEET youth—from seeing them as “*high-risk*” to recognising them as “*untapped assets with real potential.*” Approximately one-quarter of interns were hired directly after placement, and most employers expressed willingness to host future cohorts. The internship model provided a low-risk trial period for employers to assess performance, building trust and dispelling stereotypes. Some businesses reported adapting HR practices by introducing clearer orientation, feedback sessions, or mentoring to better support first-time workers.

Training institutions also internalised PYEEEP’s inclusive and learner-centred principles. TTI, MMDC, and KRTC reported improvements in retention after integrating psychosocial support, flexible scheduling, and gender-inclusive teaching. The program prompted reflection on how to better accommodate non-traditional learners: “*We started listening more to students’ life challenges, not just their grades,*” said one trainer. Institutions also gained capacity in monitoring, communications, and human rights reporting through SPC-led training.

At the government level, PYEEEP contributed to a perceptible policy shift. Both pilot governments co-led Technical Working Groups and National Steering Committees, signalling ownership of youth pathways as part of national policy rather than donor pilots. Officials from MWYCFA and MIA cited PYEEEP as a proof-of-concept for integrating TVET, psychosocial support, and employment services. Early signs of domestic co-financing have emerged in the Solomon Islands, reflecting growing confidence in sustaining the model.

PYEEEP’s impact extends beyond immediate employment outcomes. It has transformed the self-perception of NEET youth, strengthened family and community cohesion, and catalysed shifts in institutional and policy attitudes toward youth inclusion. The program demonstrated that targeted psychosocial support, structured internships, and government-private-youth partnerships can unlock social and economic participation for marginalised young people.

While sustained employment data remain limited, the weight of qualitative and stakeholder evidence points to tangible, multidimensional impact—personal, familial, institutional, and systemic. The pilot thus serves as both a learning platform and a catalyst for changing how Pacific societies value and invest in their youth.

Case Study 6. Sewing a Future: Young Women Turning Skills into Small Businesses

At Mary Mazzarello Development Centre in Solomon Islands, a group of young women learned textiles, catering, and budgeting. For some, this training became the foundation for small businesses.

Agnes* began sewing school uniforms and dresses for her community. “I never thought I could earn money from my hands,” she said proudly. Others, like Lillian*, turned catering practice into an income stream, cooking for weddings and church events. “With two other PYEEEP girls we formed a group. We share jobs and the income,” she explained.

One graduate started making handbags from recycled fabric and selling them at the Honiara market. “It is not much yet, but it helps with food money,” she shared.

A training officer noted: *“We expected them to look for jobs, but many are creating their own. It shows resilience — they are making livelihoods in places where the formal job market is thin.”*

These micro-enterprises may be small, but they make a big difference. Agnes explained: “Now I help my parents with bills. I even pay for my younger brother’s school fees.”

While not every graduate walked into a formal job, their entrepreneurship shows how PYEEEP nurtured innovation and self-reliance, opening pathways that fit Pacific realities.

3.5 SUSTAINABILITY

5

National Steering Committees and government co-leadership are functioning, with Solomon Islands already signalling a commitment to co-finance. However, the model is resource-intensive, and sustaining outcomes will require adaptation and budget realism to maintain wrap-around supports.

Sustainability is a program principle for PYEEEP, defined as an emphasis on supporting locally led initiatives in selected skills areas, being context-responsive and working through and strengthening existing institutions. Ensuring fiscal sustainability and strengthening effectiveness and efficiency of the model for handover requires focused attention moving forward. The evaluation notes that sustainability can often be impacted by factors outside of the program’s control such as dynamic economic operating environments and managing frequent changes in key government personnel.

Findings from the desk review demonstrate the likelihood of sustained outcomes for PYEEEP is cautiously optimistic, though dependent on several interrelated factors. Interviews and sense making workshops demonstrate an intentional approach to sustainability in PYEEEP’s design and implementation so far, however, some of the support currently provided by the program may not be sustainable in the long term.

Several deliberate steps have been taken to embed PYEEEP within national and regional structures.

The program facilitated the creation of National Steering Committees and Technical Working Groups in both Tonga and Solomon Islands, providing country-led mechanisms for pathway oversight and adaptation. These bodies included representation from youth, government, TVET providers, and civil society, enhancing local ownership.

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At the regional level, PYEEEP supported the re-establishment of the RAG and helped elevate youth economic empowerment as a key priority at the SOM and PMYM meetings. These high-level fora not only endorsed the pathways model but also catalysed cross-country learning and strategic dialogue on replication.

While the process of institutionalisation remains underway, PYEEEP's use of national coordination mechanisms and regional political engagement has laid important groundwork for long-term policy integration. However, the evaluation found that governance structures (NSC, TWG, RAG), often served overlapping functions. In practice, distinctions between strategic oversight, technical coordination, and regional advocacy were not always clear, leading to duplication of meetings, reporting requirements, and decision-making processes. Streamlining these functions into fewer, better-defined coordination bodies would strengthen accountability and reduce transaction costs for governments and SPC. Further alignment with national budgets and accreditation systems will be required to ensure continuity and legitimacy, and to reduce the risk of designing beyond national affordability. As an implementing partner, SPC's convening power remains a major asset and should continue to focus on reducing inefficiencies in program delivery.

Partnerships with established TVET institutions have strengthened institutional capacity to deliver youth-focused training. The Training of Trainers model and mentoring on human rights and inclusion represent early steps toward institutionalising rights-based practice within partner TVETs. However, the absence of strong institutional recognition or structured follow-up on this training has limited evidence of sustained capacity gains. Future phases could formalise a post-training accreditation or recognition system, such as certified "PYEEEP Trainer" status, to strengthen ownership and accountability. Embedding inclusive education modules and human-rights pedagogy into TVET teacher induction, annual refresher cycles, and performance reviews would further institutionalise practice. Structured peer learning across institutions (e.g., exchanges between ATI, TTI, MMDC, and KRTC), stronger documentation of lesson plan adaptation, and co-teaching or observation visits would also help translate training into lasting institutional change. Some stakeholders also had reservations about whether this support could feasibly continue in its current form should the model be adopted by government. This concern may be mitigated if the current capacity building functions (curriculum adaptation, mentoring, and monitoring) are progressively transitioned to national training authorities or embedded within existing staff development budgets.

In terms of **financing and service continuity** and following the Sense Making Workshop in Honiara, the Permanent Secretary for MWYCFA requested a copy of the evaluation presentation and commented, *"This is important especially to draft Cab (sic) paper for SIG to take ownership of this program, because of overwhelming good stories."*

While these indications of early domestic contributions are promising, the high-support model may face budget realism constraints if transferred wholesale to government without adaptation. Sustaining quality presents some risks. Stakeholders cautioned that without adequate MEL or pastoral capacity, graduation outcomes may dip during transition. Governments are interested in taking on PYEEEP elements (e.g., coordinator roles, embedding pathways into ministries) – but costs and modalities remain unclear. Governments are signaling different models of ownership, in the Solomon Islands, the Ministry of Youth should lead the program, whereas in Tonga, co-financing and technical assistance is required to institutionalise pathways. While taking a bespoke approach to two pilot countries may be feasible, questions emerge whether this can be responsibly sustained if more countries are added to the program's scope.

The long-term continuation of youth pathways depends heavily on public funding, inter-ministerial coordination, and the institutionalisation of youth employment as a national development priority. The extension of funding through June 2026 provides a critical window to strengthen local systems and assess whether governments and stakeholders are prepared to sustain these investments beyond donor support.

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The evaluation recommends SPC to explore funding diversification by engaging other potential donors such as the Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

While PYEEEP's immediate focus has been on youth not in education, employment or training, its broader intent is to inform more inclusive youth policies and service delivery systems, rather than to create a stand-alone program for this group. The pilot provides an entry point for governments to understand the scale of investment and institutional coordination required to reach and retain marginalised youth. High transaction costs are therefore an expected and necessary feature of this work and should not be viewed as a barrier to sustainability. As emphasised in the global TVET and youth employment literature, including World Bank studies, affordability alone is not an adequate measure of long-term viability. Instead, sustainability should be judged by PYEEEP's contribution to establishing the policy, institutional, and financial mechanisms that enable governments to progressively deliver equitable pathways at scale.

3.6 SCALABILITY AND LEARNING

6

PYEEEP has proven a viable, youth-centred model with strong potential for adaptation, but scaling must be phased, affordable, and rooted in government ownership to avoid diluting quality. The priority now is to consolidate lessons from the pilots, expand strategically into rural-relevant pathways, and embed equity budgets to avoid excluding vulnerable youth.

Lessons from the Pilot

The PYEEEP pilot in Tonga and Solomon Islands generated a number of concrete lessons that are highly relevant for adaptation and potential scale. Perhaps the most important is the recognition that **youth-led co-design, contextualisation, and country ownership are not add-ons but central to success**. Both pilots grounded their pathways in national youth profiling and validation workshops, which ensured that training content and support mechanisms reflected youth aspirations and labour market needs. Reinforcing the design process through youth presence on National Steering Committees and Technical Working Groups, not only improved pathway relevance but also fostered early buy-in from government ministries and employers.

A second transferable lesson is the **integration of technical skills with work readiness training** and structured internships. The blend of accredited TVET qualifications, soft skills development, and employer exposure bridged the training-to-work gap. Employers reported shifting perceptions of NEET youth from risks to untapped assets, underscoring the value of experiential learning in overcoming stigma.

Third, **wrap-around supports** proved decisive in ensuring vulnerable youth were able to complete pathways. The completion rate across Cohort 1 reflects the success of this high-support model, which enabled participation by youth who would otherwise have dropped out. However, it also highlights a core tension: these supports are resource-intensive, raising questions about affordability and sustainability at scale.

Finally, PYEEEP has demonstrated the **power of storytelling and advocacy in regional fora**. Multimedia case studies, youth testimonies, and visibility at regional events elevated youth voices and positioned PYEEEP as a model for replication. This suggests that learning is not only about technical design but also about how evidence and narratives are mobilised to build political will.

Enabling Conditions for Replication and Expansion

While the pilot confirmed PYEEEP's proof-of-concept, scaling requires specific enabling conditions. These can be grouped into institutional, financial, political, and social domains.

1. **Institutional readiness is critical.** Countries considering adoption must have accredited training institutions with capacity to deliver youth-tailored pathways, as well as ministries with mandates and resources for youth development. The Solomon Islands benefitted from existing TVET institutions and a Ministry of Youth willing to lead, while Tonga required stronger technical assistance to operationalise commitments.
2. **Financial commitment is another determinant.** To date, government contributions have been in-kind (staff time, facilities, office space). Evidence of emerging domestic co-financing in the Solomon Islands is promising, but long-term viability depends on budget allocations or cost-sharing models that support stipends and internships. Without such mechanisms, there is risk of creating expectations that cannot be met once donor funding ends.
3. **Political leadership and governance structures are also enabling factors.** Functioning NSCs and TWGs create platforms for coordination, but their effectiveness has been uneven. TWG quorum/allowances and ministry PM capacity directly affect cadence, partner coordination, and risk response where often decision-making lagged. Future scale will require streamlined governance arrangements with clear mandates, resources, and accountability mechanisms.
4. **Social support systems remain essential.** Families reported both pride and strain during youth participation—pride in seeing children graduate, but strain from loss of household labour and childcare pressures. Scaling will need to institutionalise mechanisms that mitigate these costs, such as flexible participation, childcare provision, and engagement of parents as allies in the process.
5. A further enabling condition for replication concerns the **internal capacity and resourcing of SPC** to manage both the ongoing pilot and any future scale-up. PYEEEP's implementation benefitted from a small but highly skilled team within HRSD, supported by MELKMC and country coordinators. However, this lean structure was stretched by the intensity of technical engagement, cross-country coordination, and the level of support required by training institutions. Scaling up the model would therefore require corresponding investment in programme management, technical, and monitoring staff within SPC. Without such reinforcement, there is a risk that quality assurance, data systems, and inclusion standards could be diluted as coverage expands.

Scale Options and Scenarios

The evaluation identified four main scenarios for scaling PYEEEP, each with distinct opportunities and trade-offs. These options are not mutually exclusive and can be integrated in a phased approach to scale.

Option 1. Within Existing Country Expansion



Increasing cohort sizes or extending to rural and outer island locations. This scenario offers immediate efficiency gains by diluting fixed costs and addressing equity gaps. For example, the Solomon Islands received over 1,600 applications for 60 places, demonstrating untapped demand. However, larger cohorts may compromise the personalised support that drove high completion rates. In addition, despite being underrepresented in the pilot, rural outreach requires significant investment in transport and boarding facilities (adaptation rather than replication).

Adaptation

Rural-relevant pathways: Agriculture, carpentry, and small business skills were identified in both Tonga and Solomon Islands validation workshops as high-demand and more relevant to rural

livelihoods than hospitality or electrical trades. Prioritising these sectors would improve uptake and labour market fit.

Boarding and transport models: Infrastructure risks, such as the boarding facility closure in Solomon Islands, demonstrated that housing and transport are weak points. For rural expansion, cost-effective and safer solutions (facility standards, transport allowances, host-family models) must be codified.

Flexible delivery: Rural training could benefit from modular training blocks, mobile trainers, and partnerships with existing Rural Training Centres (RTCs), provided these approaches are adapted to local capacity and resources. This reduces the need for permanent relocation and lowers dropout risk. However, they would also require careful planning to maintain the wrap-around supports that have proven essential to retention.

Family and community engagement: Many rural households rely heavily on youth labour. Expansion must incorporate stronger parental engagement, stipends that compensate for foregone earnings, and community sensitisation to shift perceptions of training as a long-term investment.

Benefits: Builds on tested partnerships, existing curricula, and governance structures; allows for improved data systems, employer engagement, and quality assurance before expansion.

Risks: May limit regional momentum or donor appetite if results remain confined to pilot countries; sustained funding and national ownership still need to be secured.

Option 2. Technical Expansion (urban)



Adding new pathways in sectors such as agriculture, carpentry, plumbing, or digital skills. This aligns with youth interests and labour market demand. Start-up costs are significant (curriculum design, accreditation, equipment), but once embedded, such diversification could improve employability and resilience of graduates.

Benefits: Responds directly to national priorities (e.g., agriculture, carpentry) and increases pathways for rural youth; uses existing institutional platforms to diversify opportunities.

Risks: Expanding sector coverage without additional technical or management capacity could overextend SPC and dilute wrap-around support quality.

Option 3. Regional or Multi-Country Expansion



Extending PYEEEP beyond the two pilot countries to other Pacific Island Countries (PICs). This would build on momentum from regional fora and respond to calls from governments in Micronesia and Polynesia. Risks include start-up delays, high transaction costs, and the challenge of tailoring models across diverse contexts. Stakeholders agree on a preference for phased expansion with Solomon Islands and Tonga consolidating first, followed by selective entry into North Pacific contexts, rather than rapid regional roll-out.

Benefits: Positions SPC as a regional centre of excellence in inclusive youth pathways; strengthens alignment with the successor Pacific Youth Development Framework and regional policy commitments.

Risks: Requires significant scale-up of staffing, MEL systems, and partner readiness; contextual differences may affect feasibility and comparability of outcomes.

Option 4. National Integration

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Embedding PYEEEP pathways within government systems, with ministries leading delivery and sharing costs. This scenario offers the strongest potential for long-term sustainability and value for money, provided that technical assistance safeguards quality. For instance, accreditation and micro-credential linkages across countries could create efficiencies while aligning with regional labour mobility frameworks such as PACER Plus. However, governments emphasised that wholesale absorption of the high-support model is unrealistic; adapted, cost-sensitive versions will be required.

Benefits: Embeds pathways in national systems, supporting long-term ownership, budget alignment, and policy coherence; reduces dependency on external funding; enables SPC to focus on regional knowledge sharing, standards, and technical quality assurance.

Risks: National systems may lack capacity or fiscal space to maintain the high-support model; uneven institutionalisation could lead to variable delivery quality across countries.

Risks

Scaling PYEEEP involves several trade-offs between depth of support and breadth of reach. The pilot demonstrated that high intensity supports drive completion and empowerment but are costly. Expanding too quickly without adaptation risks eroding the quality and inclusiveness that made the pilot effective.

Another risk concerns fiscal sustainability. Governments are interested in taking on elements of PYEEEP, but costs and modalities remain unclear. Without predictable financing, scale may rely on continued donor subsidies.

Operational risks also emerge at scale. Infrastructure failures (as seen in the Solomon Islands training facility closure), weak local governance, and staff burnout in small core teams are key considerations. These risks underscore the importance of investing in institutional capacity, MEL systems, and safeguarding protocols before pursuing large-scale replication. Facility standards/checklists and escalation protocols should be codified as part of safeguarding and continuity.

Labour mobility and care-economy dynamics continue to shape patterns of participation, dropout, and employment outcomes across both pilot countries. These factors reflect broader structural realities of Pacific labour markets, where migration, caregiving responsibilities, and external employment schemes play a central role in youth livelihoods. As PYEEEP evolves, there is value in considering how such dynamics can be more intentionally integrated into pathway design. Either by aligning with existing regional mobility and re-entry schemes, or by strengthening opportunities for local employment and enterprise creation that reinforce national contribution and community development.

Partnerships and Synergies

Scaling PYEEEP requires a broader partnership base that leverages existing institutions rather than creating parallel systems.

- **National TVET institutions and RTC networks:** Extending partnerships beyond the four pilot institutions would allow geographic expansion. Many RTCs already reach rural communities but lack accreditation and curriculum support. These are gaps PYEEEP could help fill.
- **Private sector and Chambers of Commerce:** Employers were pivotal in internships and hiring. Strengthening partnerships with Chambers (SICCI, TCCI) and expanding to rural industries such as agribusiness, construction, and cooperatives will be essential.
- **Civil society and faith-based organisations:** Identified in both pilots as trusted intermediaries, they can support recruitment, mentoring, and retention at relatively low cost.

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- **MFAT's broader youth and skills portfolio:** PYEEEP is complementary to bilateral education and labour mobility investments in both Tonga and Solomon Islands. Opportunities include embedding work-readiness and pastoral modules into secondary or TVET curricula, aligning with New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer and Pacific Australia Labour Mobility schemes, and integrating with MFAT's digital/remote education investments including the Commonwealth of Learning's Pacific Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning. However, limited and uneven access to reliable digital infrastructure in both countries means that digital learning components should remain supplementary, with blended or community-based delivery models prioritised to ensure equitable access.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The PYEEEP pilot has demonstrated that inclusive, locally led pathways can reconnect disengaged youth with learning, employment, and civic participation opportunities in the Pacific. The evaluation concludes that the initiative remains highly relevant to regional and national priorities and offers credible early evidence of effectiveness and systems influence. The evaluation set out to assess PYEEEP's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and contribution to inclusive development, and to identify lessons for scale. Across these domains, the assessment finds that PYEEEP has delivered proof of concept for a multi-stakeholder, youth-centred model that combines technical training, work readiness, psychosocial support, and policy engagement. The model is widely regarded by governments, youth, and partners as an important innovation in addressing the persistent challenge of youth NEET inclusion in the Pacific. PYEEEP has now progressed beyond its initial pilot stage and is in full implementation, providing a valuable opportunity to test, refine, and embed the pathways model within national systems. While gaps remain in data, sustainability, and scalability, these are characteristic of a program in its early implementation phase and present important areas for continued learning and improvement as the model matures.

Relevance

PYEEEP is strongly aligned with the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF), the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and national youth policies in Tonga and Solomon Islands. Its participatory design and country-specific profiling ensured contextualisation to labour market demand, particularly in care, hospitality, and trades. However the choice of training focus was also linked to availability and willingness of training institutions to work with the program on an amended curriculum. At the regional level, visibility at the 2024 Senior Officials Meeting and Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting positioned PYEEEP as a tangible demonstration of regional collaboration under the PYDF.

Effectiveness and Impact

PYEEEP has achieved measurable outcomes in employability, confidence, and social participation among its 62 graduates from Cohort 1. Many transitioned into paid work, and others pursued further study or entrepreneurship. These are modest but meaningful gains in the Pacific context, where formal labour absorption is structurally limited. Empowerment outcomes were equally significant. Participants consistently reported improved self-belief, leadership, and family relations, with parents describing renewed household optimism and pride. Wrap-around supports were decisive in enabling participation, especially for young women and caregivers. These empowerment gains are central to the program's theory of change, positioning young people as capable contributors to both the economy and civic life, a dimension that is often underdeveloped in conventional TVET programming across the Pacific.

At a systems level, PYEEEP influenced how employers and institutions view NEET youth, from "at-risk" to "asset." Training institutions adapted curricula and student policies, while ministries increased coordination around youth employment. The program also utilised local governance structures such as Technical Working Groups and National Steering Committees, ensuring buy-in for a broader policy shift toward youth inclusion and skills-based pathways. Importantly, PYEEEP was designed in close consultation with governments, building on lessons from earlier initiatives such as the Youth@Work program. In Solomon Islands, stakeholders explicitly sought a refined model that prioritised quality, inclusion, and sustainability over scale (i.e., with smaller cohort sizes).

Efficiency and Value for Money

PYEEEP's resource intensity reflects deliberate design choices for a high-support pilot. The program achieved strong completion and satisfaction rates with relatively low operational costs due to in-kind contributions and cost-free internships. Underspend during early implementation was used to refine delivery

and expand second cohorts, improving efficiency over time. The pilot's cost profile remains higher than national TVET averages, but evidence suggests high social returns such as improved wellbeing, reduced household stress, and employer willingness to host future interns. Future phases could achieve better cost-benefit ratios by leveraging economies of scale and integrating selected functions into government or TVET systems.

Sustainability

There is cautious optimism regarding the durability of outcomes. Governments in both countries are co-leading implementation through National Steering Committees and contributing in-kind resources such as staff and facilities. In Solomon Islands, there are early signals of domestic budget contributions, while Tonga has expressed readiness for a co-financing arrangement subject to technical assistance. However, full institutionalisation is still nascent. The model's sustainability will depend on continued investment in MEL, pastoral care, and coordination capacity in supporting youth NEET to transition to training and eventually the workplace. These are functions that risk erosion if transferred prematurely without adequate resourcing.

SPC's approach has built institutional capability among TVET providers and increased regional commitment to youth employment through policy fora and the reactivation of the Regional Advisory Group. These mechanisms provide a foundation for long-term policy embedding, though the program's comprehensive support package may require adaptation to remain financially feasible within national budgets.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

GEDSI has been a defining strength of PYEEEP, though documentation has not always kept pace with practice. Gender equality was embedded in both design and delivery: women accessed non-traditional trades through MMDC, men entered care sectors, and all pathways were supported by stipends and flexible arrangements to accommodate caregiving. Disability inclusion improved through targeted outreach and collaboration with HRSD's inclusion specialists, though data on participation and outcomes remain limited. Future phases would benefit from systematic disaggregation and stronger monitoring of inclusion results. The pilot also contributed to shifting social norms such as normalising men in caregiving, validating women's leadership, and modelling equitable participation in mixed-gender learning environments.

Scalability and Learning

PYEEEP's proof of concept provides valuable lessons for replication. Its integrated, wrap-around model is adaptable but should not be replicated wholesale without attention to affordability and capacity. Stakeholders favour a "deeper before broader" approach—consolidating within existing countries, expanding cohort size, and diversifying pathways (e.g., agriculture, carpentry) before pursuing regional expansion. However, unchecked diversification of training sectors (based on youth preferences) risks diluting quality; expansion should focus on a small number of pathways where labour demand, youth interest, and institutional readiness clearly align. National integration with cost-sharing offers the most viable pathway to scale, provided quality assurance and safeguarding standards are maintained.

The evidence suggests that youth-centred design, integrated pathways, wrap-around supports, and strong governance are the building blocks of success for PYEEEP. Scaling requires aligning these features with institutional capacity, financing, and political will, while managing trade-offs between depth and breadth. By consolidating gains, codifying learning, and supporting governments to adapt the model to their own contexts, PYEEEP can move from a promising pilot to a regionally significant approach to youth empowerment and employment in the Pacific.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations build on the findings of this evaluation and are intended to guide the future direction of PYEEEP and related youth programming across the Pacific. They reflect areas of strong performance as well as systemic and operational gaps. Each recommendation is grounded in evidence from the pilot.

Recommendation	Detail	Linked Findings
1 Consolidate depth before expansion.	Strengthen quality assurance, institutional capacity, MEL systems, and cost realism in Tonga and Solomon Islands before extending geographically. Model realistic cohort growth scenarios and ensure staffing for MEL and pastoral care grows proportionally. Embed sustainable financing mechanisms and keep delivery affordable for governments.	Relevance (3.1); Effectiveness (3.2); Efficiency (3.3); Sustainability (3.5)
2 Phase scale cautiously.	Adopt a staged approach to scaling by first consolidating in current countries, then selectively expanding to other Pacific contexts, and later to wider regional rollout. Disaggregate unit costs by pathway and support type to inform scale-up choices. Aligns with MFAT's "fewer, deeper" investment principle.	Scale & Learning (3.6); Efficiency (3.3); Sensemaking Findings
3 Diversify pathways strategically.	Expand into sectors where youth interest and market demand converge such as agriculture, carpentry, and possibly digital skills. Be guided by labour market analysis and employer perception surveys with chambers and business groups. Use findings to strengthen relevance and inform microfinance or entrepreneurship pathways.	Relevance (3.1–3.2); Effectiveness (3.2 KEQ 2 & 4); Impact (3.4)
4 Prioritise rural and outer island expansion.	Design delivery models that reach beyond capitals using adapted modular training, mobile trainers, and partnerships with RTCs. Emphasise rural-relevant pathways and cost-sharing with local institutions.	Relevance (3.1 KEQ 1 & 2); Equity /GEDSI; Scale & Learning (3.6)
5 Safeguard equity at scale.	Retain core supports as non-negotiables. Ring-fence funding for these low-cost, high-impact services and formalise entry options for young mothers and caregivers. Develop a formal Inclusion Strategy with partnerships (e.g., OPDs), accessibility audits, and disaggregated reporting by gender, disability, province, and caregiving status.	GEDSI / Inclusive Development Findings; Effectiveness (3.2 KEQ 6 & 7); Impact (3.4 KEQ 10 & 11)
7 Strengthen financing and ownership.	Support governments to tag, track, and progressively increase NEET-related allocations within national youth and skills budgets. Pilot cost-sharing arrangements that	Sustainability (3.5 KEQ 13 & 14); Efficiency (3.3 KEQ 7 & 8); OVI 2.3

integrate stipends, subsidies, and pastoral care into government funding streams.

8 Invest in MEL, knowledge, and advocacy.	Allocate dedicated MEL and communications staff per country to enhance data credibility and produce studies on employment, self-employment, and system outcomes. Continue producing compelling case studies and videos to humanise impact and support advocacy. Facilitate exchanges between Tonga and Solomon Islands to share learning.	Efficiency (3.3); Scale & Learning (3.6 KEQ 15 & 16); Sensemaking Findings
9 Continue to ensure accountability and evidence-based adaptation.	Establish formal national and regional feedback loops linking youth, employers, training institutions, and governments. Capture governance lessons and cohort data systematically to support adaptive management and policy learning. For example, a short “post-cohort reflection” or “youth exit survey” shared with TWG/NSC meetings to review what worked. Hold annual national “learning and reflection” workshops co-chaired by the ministry, TVET partners, and youth reps.	Scale & Learning (3.6 KEQ 15 & 16); Governance Findings; Sensemaking Workshop
10 Integrate with MFAT and other initiatives.	Explore the opportunity to deepen linkages with bilateral TVET, education, and labour mobility investments. Embed PYEEEP’s proven innovations within these programs to create synergies and reduce duplication.	Coherence and Relevance (Section 2 & 3.1); Scale & Learning (3.6)
11 Explore alignment with (do not over-pivot toward) labour mobility frameworks.	Align with PACER Plus and regional TVET standards to enhance portability and recognition of qualifications, while ensuring PYEEEP continues to strengthen domestic employment pathways.	Sustainability (3.5 KEQ 14); Efficiency (3.3 KEQ 9); Sensemaking Governance Findings
12 Leverage technology cautiously.	Use digital platforms for outreach, micro-credentials, and peer networks, particularly for remote youth, while maintaining offline delivery as the backbone given persistent connectivity barriers.	Efficiency (3.3 Risks & Mitigation); Sustainability (3.5); Sensemaking
13 Clarify governance and accountability.	Define clear roles, and light-touch performance tracking for National Steering Committees and Technical Working Groups. Address allowance practices that affect quorum and ensure governance bodies remain functional and focused on oversight, not incentives.	Impact (3.4 KEQ 12); Sustainability (3.5 KEQ 13); Scale & Learning (3.6 KEQ 16)
14 Strengthen safeguarding and infrastructure standards.	Develop and enforce minimum standards and annual operational risk checklists for residential and training facilities, covering safety, plumbing, and safeguarding. Maintain contingency funding for emergencies to protect program continuity and participant welfare.	Scale & Learning (3.6 KEQ 15); Efficiency (3.3); GEDSI Findings on accessibility