

Proactive Release

Date: 13 September 2022

The following Cabinet paper and related Cabinet minutes have been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Title	Reference
<i>Supporting Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for People in Pacific Island Counties</i>	
<i>Supporting Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for People in Pacific Island Countries</i>	ERS-22-MIN-0026
<i>Report of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee: Period Ended 22 July 2022</i>	CAB-21-MIN-0268

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the OIA that would apply have been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to OIA redaction codes:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 6(b)(ii): to protect the passing of information from an international organisation on a confidential basis.

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cabinet ERS Committee

Supporting Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for People in Pacific Island Countries

Proposal

1. This paper proposes a scaled up multi-country investment in sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific. It seeks approval to allocate up to NZ\$30 million over five years (2022-2027) from the existing earmarked core funding in the international development cooperation appropriation, to support improved health outcomes through Pacific peoples' full realisation of their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Relation to government priorities

2. Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's strategic development priorities for gender and health. It also contributes to the strategic foreign policy goal of supporting a stable, prosperous and resilient Pacific. This investment aligns with MFAT's Child and Youth Well-being Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025.
3. By supporting social resilience in Pacific Island countries, the proposed funding aligns with the approach set out in the cabinet paper Pacific Resilience Approach, approved by the ERS on 28 September 2021 (CAB-21-MIN-0401, ERS-21-MIN-0031).

Executive Summary

4. Globally, significant achievements have been made in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. These include decreased maternal and infant mortality ratios, improved access to contraception, falling fertility rates, and increased life expectancy. In the Pacific however progress towards improved sexual and reproductive health and rights has been slow and inconsistent, despite the efforts of governments and partners.
5. Pacific Island countries experience substantial sexual reproductive health and rights challenges, including:
 - high levels of unmet need for contraception;
 - high levels of sexual and gender based violence; and
 - high adolescent pregnancy rates.
6. There have been investments in these areas, but basic services and commodities are still lacking. Until these essentials are met few other interventions or innovations will make a significant impact. The area of greatest need is in the realm of family planning, as

evidenced by low levels of modern contraceptive use, high unmet need for family planning and high fertility and adolescent birth rates.

7. A scaled up multi-country investment by Aotearoa New Zealand in these areas will deliver significant improvements in the lives of people across the Pacific, including the most vulnerable. The investment will support people to achieve their desired family size through access to modern contraceptive methods and it will provide information to support people to make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations and reproductive healthcare.
8. This project proposes using both private and public sector partners to achieve these outcomes. These partners will leverage their respective strengths to: strengthen Pacific health systems; strengthen family planning service delivery and education; and strengthen grassroots community sexual and reproductive health and rights advocacy efforts.
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9. The proposed investment recognises that family planning is essential for improving the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It also acknowledges family planning is one of the ‘best buys’ for health sector investment, with every dollar spent on contraceptive services beyond current levels reducing the cost of pregnancy-related and new-born care by three dollars.

Background

Pacific Commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights

10. At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Pacific community recognised sexual and reproductive health and rights as fundamental to human rights, and agreed to the ensuing Programme of Action.
11. In August 2012, the Pacific Islands Forum endorsed the Gender Equality Declaration, where Pacific leaders committed to ensuring reproductive health, education, awareness and service programs receive adequate funding support¹.
12. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is also a critical component of achieving SDGs 3 (good health and well-being) and 5 (gender equality). However, at the current trajectory, most Pacific Island countries will not meet SDG targets of universal access to sexual and reproductive care, family planning and education (SDG 3.7) and ensuring universal access to reproductive health and rights (SDG 5.6).

Impact of COVID-19 on service delivery

13. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of continued provision of essential health services. The pandemic has placed further strain on the delivery of sexual and

¹ The Gender Equality Declaration is currently under review by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat.

reproductive health services and increased barriers to accessing services, exacerbating the challenges of achieving progress towards SDG 3 and 5. COVID-19 is impacting the ability to use contraception in a number of ways:

- supply chain disruptions limit the production, distribution and availability of family planning commodities, often resulting in stock-outs;
- healthcare facilities are reducing services as healthcare providers are redirected from family planning services to the COVID-19 response; and
- limited access to healthcare facilities due to lockdowns or fear of exposure to COVID-19.

14. Now is an ideal time to take advantage of some of the lessons and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. These include solving supply chain bottlenecks, strengthening remote healthcare provision through digital means and capitalising on health management information systems, which have been effectively utilised for COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

Aotearoa New Zealand has been a crucial partner supporting Pacific sexual and reproductive health and rights.

15. Aotearoa New Zealand has provided sexual and reproductive health and rights support to the Pacific through a variety of partners both bilaterally and through regional efforts.

Our regional efforts are outlined in the table below.

Partner	Amount NZ\$	Objective
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Sub Regional Office of the Pacific	\$2 million	To implement IPPF's Niu Vaka Pacific Strategy. This provides the small non-government Member Associations of IPPF in 9 Pacific countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) with support to provide essential sexual and reproductive health and rights services (2019-2022).
IPPF Sub Regional Office of the Pacific	\$2 million	To support sexual and reproductive health and rights during humanitarian crises in Tuvalu, Cook Islands and Kiribati (2019-2022)
Pacific Sub Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and	\$3.82 million	To support youth access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services and census work in the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands,

the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)		Tonga and Vanuatu. This is part of a pilot New Zealand UN Pacific Partnership (2020-2022).
IPPF	\$7.5 million	To deliver sexual and reproductive health and rights services globally (2022-2024)
UNFPA	\$18 million	To support normative agenda-setting, institutional strengthening, capacity building, and technical support globally (2022-2024).
UNFPA Pacific Sub Regional Office for the Pacific	\$6 million	Previous funding provided to deliver a Regional Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme, to improve sexual and reproductive health in Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu (2010-2014).

Continued support is required as challenges remain

16. Partner countries, donors, multilaterals, international non-governmental organisations and others have also been investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific for many years. Despite these investments, Pacific Island countries still experience substantial sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges. These lead to lasting negative health and socio-economic impacts, particularly for the most vulnerable populations in Pacific Island countries, such as women and girls, those living in remote locations, those living with disabilities and persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).
17. Progress has been very slow for a number of reasons, including:
 - s6(a) with country health budgets constrained by the costs of tackling Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), the high costs of overseas treatment for services not available in their country, and costs of responding to increasing natural disasters;
 - limited access to high quality services and commodities in remote locations; and
 - limited youth friendly information and services.

Analysis

Mapping Aotearoa New Zealand's next sexual and reproductive health and rights investments

18. Aotearoa New Zealand's key multi-country sexual and reproductive health and rights investments in the Pacific are coming to conclusion. Officials have taken this opportunity to take stock and learn from our experiences to determine the shape and scale of future investment in this important area.

19. MFAT commissioned an independent sexual and reproductive health and rights analysis report in 2021. The report examined 15 Pacific countries' sexual and reproductive health and rights needs, along with past and current interventions and potential new modalities, partnerships and approaches for a future Aotearoa New Zealand investment. As part of this work, a literature review was undertaken, data analysis conducted, and interviews held with over 85 key informants across the region.
20. The key findings of the report were that:
- the area of greatest sexual and reproductive health and rights need is access to family planning, evidenced by low levels of modern contraceptive use, high unmet need for family planning and high fertility and adolescent birth rates;
 - the realisation of rights and social protection for vulnerable groups such as women, youth, people living with disabilities, and persons of diverse SOGIESC is inadequate across Pacific Island countries;
 - s6(a), s6(b)(ii)
- and
- s6(a)
21. The analysis report concluded that until basic services and commodities are provided, the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of a population cannot be met and few other interventions or innovations will be able to make a significant impact.
22. The report also identified three important lessons from past sexual and reproductive health and rights investments that need to be carried forward in any future support, namely that:
- basic services must be implemented to the quality and scale that they were intended and are needed;
 - information and choice are empowering and the provision of comprehensive, person-centred sexual and reproductive health and rights information is a basic, foundational component of sexual and reproductive health and rights and needs to improve in quality and increase in scale; and
 - health system strengthening and healthcare delivery interventions need to be fully institutionalised, operationalised and monitored across the system and for the long-term.

Implementation

Focus

23. The Analysis Report recommended that Aotearoa New Zealand's investment go deep not wide and get the basics right with a focus on family planning. This conclusion was based on the low levels of modern contraceptive use, high unmet need for family planning, high fertility and adolescent birth rates. It was also supported by key informant interviews and an examination of past evaluations.

Implementing Partners

24. Our investment would be delivered through both public and private sector channels. Public sector investment is important for both delivery of services to the general population (greatest reach) and for health system strengthening. Private sector investment takes advantage of less restrictions, greater agility and the chance to better reflect and respond to the needs of their clients and target populations.
25. Officials have been working closely with Australian officials on the design of this investment, to both leverage Australia's support in this area and to avoid duplication.
26. There are only a limited number of partners working in the sexual and reproductive health and rights arena in the Pacific. A multi-pronged approach will ensure partners can leverage their agency strengths to deliver in a range of areas to address these needs.

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Approach

27. The investment will seek to create a more locally driven process that better aligns with the current priorities and capabilities of the implementing partners, and generates more motivation, ownership, and accountability. By ensuring the investment aligns with the agreed ambitions and strategies of partner countries, partners will be able to pursue and fulfil priorities they have already identified in their national/regional strategies and plans. This will encourage a greater focus on outcomes and create more ownership and accountability for those outcomes.

Timing

28. The activity will be undertaken in a phased approach. This will include discussions with countries and partners on the proposed approach and activities, the finalisation of contract arrangements, including staffing resources to support the investment, disbursement of funding and continued monitoring and evaluation. s6(a)

Financial Implications

29. This proposal will cost up to NZ\$30 million, disbursed over five financial years (2022/23-26/27). The funding will be drawn from existing core funding within the International Development Cooperation (IDC) appropriation which has been allocated for this priority initiative.
30. The breakdown of the proposed funding is based on countries covered, absorptive capacity of partners and outcomes sought. These figures are indicative.

Legislative Implications

31. There are no legislative implications from this proposal.

² The Pacific Feminist Fund is not yet a legal entity. Once registered, MFAT will support its establishment through funds managed by the Inclusive Development team.

Impact Analysis

32. There are no regulatory or climate implications arising from this proposal.

Population Implications

33. This proposal is likely to impact on different population groups in the Pacific, including rural communities, disabled people, women, persons of diverse SOGIESC. The proposed investment prioritises reaching the most marginalised and vulnerable communities, including persons of diverse SOGIESC and those living with disabilities, who are often excluded in sexual and reproductive health and rights programming.

Human Rights

34. The proposal is consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993 and highlights our commitment to addressing international human rights priorities.
35. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are related to multiple human rights, including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education, and the prohibition of discrimination. This proposal is aligned with MFAT's International Human Rights Action Plan 2019-2023, under which Aotearoa New Zealand plays a leadership role in human rights advocacy around four areas, one of which is gender equality and women's empowerment, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, maternal mortality and morbidity, leadership and political participation.

Consultation

36. The New Zealand Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Pacific Peoples have been consulted and are comfortable with the proposed approach.

Communications

37. Following approvals and agreement with the partner countries and development partners, I propose to make an announcement on this support, in line with a communications plan developed by officials.

Proactive Release

38. I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper following Cabinet consideration, subject to necessary redactions including to preserve our relations with Pacific Island Governments, and any sensitive information that has been shared with Aotearoa New Zealand.

Recommendations

39. I recommend that Cabinet:

1. **Note** that Pacific Island countries are experiencing substantial sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges and basic services and commodities are still lacking;
2. **Note** that New Zealand has previously invested in sexual and reproductive health and rights, through global core funding, Pacific multi-country and bilateral funding;
3. **Note** that the area of greatest need is family planning and that research has identified a multi-pronged approach across public and private sectors is required to best address this;
4. **Agree** to a scaled up multi-country investment in sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific to meet and maintain basic essentials of family planning service delivery, commodity supply and counselling/education; and
5. **Agree** to allocate NZ\$30 million from within existing international development cooperation programme resources for this purpose.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Supporting Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for People in Pacific Island Countries

Portfolio Foreign Affairs

On 19 July 2022, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee:

- 1 **noted** that Pacific Island countries are experiencing substantial sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges, and that basic services and commodities are still lacking;
- 2 **noted** that New Zealand has previously invested in sexual and reproductive health and rights, through global core funding, and Pacific multi-country and bilateral funding;
- 3 **noted** that the area of greatest need is family planning, and that research has identified a multi-pronged approach across the public and private sectors is required to best address this need;
- 4 **agreed** to a scaled-up multi-country investment in sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Pacific to meet and maintain basic essentials of family planning service delivery, commodity supply and counselling/education;
- 5 **agreed** to allocate NZ\$30 million from within existing international development cooperation programme resources for this purpose.

Janine Harvey
Committee Secretary

Present:

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern (Chair)
Hon Grant Robertson
Hon Andrew Little
Hon David Parker
Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Hon Stuart Nash
Hon Peeni Henare
Hon Michael Wood
Hon Dr David Clark
Hon Kieran McAnulty

Officials present from:

Office of the Prime Minister
Officials Committee for ERS



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee: Period Ended 22 July 2022

On 25 July 2022, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee for the period ended 22 July 2022:

ERS-22-MIN-0026 **Supporting Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for People in Pacific Island Countries** CONFIRMED
Portfolio: Foreign Affairs

Rachel Hayward
Acting Secretary of the Cabinet