



## **Regional School Meal Program Updates Plenary**

### **Pacific Island regional update**

Provided at the Global Child Nutrition Forum (December, 2024)

The Pacific Islands region is a unique and diverse region. Located across the South Pacific Ocean, our countries and territories range in size from one island to consisting of many hundreds of small islands. We have strong cultures, and food plays a very important role in this. Schools are also an important part of our communities. Some of our islands have limited capacity to produce food, while the remote location of some islands presents challenges with food procurement, storage and preparation.

However, the triple burden of malnutrition, high rates of diet-related non-communicable disease, and climate change are pressing issues. Providing local foods in schools could be a mechanism to increase the consumption of nutritious diets, boost educational outcomes, support local livelihoods and economies and have a positive impact on our environment.

In the Pacific Islands region there are currently only a few national school meals programs, but we are seeing a significant interest in school food and nutrition environments, including school meals programs.

Currently Kiribati is working to develop a national school meals program, while school meals are also provided in Palau, Nauru in large scale programs.

Across other Pacific Islands Countries and Territories, other activities include school-based programs that link to local producers, school gardens and integrating nutrition education. Some examples of these include:

- The Cook Islands School garden Program, that provides education and introduces agriculture as an entry point into science in primary schools

- The Pacific Territories Regional Project for Sustainable Ecosystem Management (PROTEGE) school feeding program in French Polynesia that provides students with a meal, promoting local food production and food security.
- The Ambaebulu School Farm to School initiative in Vanuatu, that supports healthy diets and local livelihoods
- The Green Schools Program in Fiji that seeks to improve food security and nutrition status and supports connecting of the younger generation to culture and land from spiritual and practical elements
- The Pacific School Food Lab in New Caledonia that coordinates the set up and liaison between canteen chefs and local producers
- Boarding schools, like those in Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, that provide meals to students who reside at the school during school terms.

While there is limited data on school food and nutrition activities across the region, funding partners are indicating their interest in this area, and more research is occurring. A recently completed study, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and including 22 countries and territories, sought to identify and document current activities, as well as identify what 'homegrown school meals' might look like in the region. At the moment there is a need to identify and evaluate models for school meals programs.

As a diverse and geographically spread region, the Pacific School Food Network is working to connect stakeholders, share resources and advocate for school food and nutrition activities, including school meals programs. A database of activities is now available on the Pacific School Food Network website to help share examples and ideas. The network is also collaborating with key UN agencies across the region and with funding support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is committed to supporting Pacific stakeholders to attend and contribute to regional and global events, such as this.

In closing, I would like to thank the GCNF and Japan for the opportunity to contribute to this panel and provide an overview of the Pacific Islands context.