

# PACIFIC REGIONAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCAN

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# OVERVIEW

## Introduction

This report considers the issue of youth employment in the Pacific and options for policy engagement that might be supported by the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP). It applies a developmental leadership lens to assess the politics of youth employment issues and labour market reform challenges that need to be addressed to improve employment outcomes for young people in the region.

It should be clear from the outset that this report does not seek to make comprehensive recommendations to improve youth employment outcomes. The complexity of the youth employment challenges across the region puts them beyond the capacity of any donor or development program to address alone. In addition, it is not within PLP's mandate or resource capacity to engage holistically with the range of issues that contribute to the youth employment challenge experienced in each of its focus countries and at the Pacific regional level. As such, the report approaches youth employment from a developmental leadership and policy reform perspective. It considers the nature of the policy challenges involved with youth employment issues, the politics that contribute to those challenges and possible entry points for supporting policy reforms that might bring about better youth employment outcomes. In making programming recommendations to guide PLP's engagement with the issue of youth employment, the report focuses on those reform issues that PLP has a comparative advantage with which to engage constructively.

## Methodology

The report focuses on youth employment challenges in PLP's four program countries (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa) and also considers youth employment from a regional perspective. It draws on a desk-top review of relevant documentation and targeted interviews with key stakeholders conducted in-country over the period June to July 2015. The report takes a broad definition of youth, including individuals between 15 to 35 years, in response to the varying definitions of youth adopted by the different stakeholders consulted in the development of this report. It should be noted that this report does not provide an overarching analysis of Pacific youth labour markets, including skills gaps, for there are comprehensive studies that have already done so. Rather, the paper draws on existing analyses of labour markets and on various policy documents to establish the policy context regarding youth employment, and focuses on the politics of youth employment and possible policy reform issues within this context.

## Youth Employment Context

Youth employment is a critical development and policy challenge facing most countries in the Pacific region. National level youth unemployment rates range from 3.2 per cent to 63.7 per cent, with higher rates for countries in the northern Pacific (SPC 2015)<sup>1</sup>. The small size of Pacific island countries' economies, limited employment opportunities, slow economic growth and the largest youth populations of any region in the world contribute to the complexity and significance of the youth employment challenge in the Pacific (The World Bank 2014). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that, on average, the unemployment rate in the 15-24 age group is nearly double that of the total workforce between 16 and 64 (UNICEF, SPC and UNFPA 2005). Large numbers of Pacific youth are discouraged from job search by lack of opportunities, and are over-represented in subsistence, precarious and informal employment, without opportunity to use their full potential (ILO 2013). Predicted growth in the region's youth population over the next decade makes it unlikely that the youth employment challenge will abate, at least significantly, in the near future (The World Bank 2014).

The consequences of insufficient jobs for young people in the Pacific are significant and broad. Access to work is an important means through which young people are included in, and participate in, society (UNICEF and SPC 2011). Given the means to do so, young people are well-positioned to enhance the economic production and social cohesion of their communities (UNICEF 2011: 7). Limited opportunities to engage in work have implications for direct welfare outcomes for young people and their families, and also for the broader economic performance and political stability of their communities (The World Bank 2014). Lack of employment opportunities has the potential to marginalise young people and to cause a range of negative consequences, including increased risk of conflict and violence (UNICEF and SPC 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Measuring youth unemployment is difficult in developing countries with large informal workforces and variable data quality, and given varying definitions. The common international measurement includes those who are actively looking for work; including discouraged job seekers and those in subsistence livelihoods who may or may not take a formal job if available, leads to much higher figures, explaining the variation in figures even within countries.

For these reasons, youth employment should be recognised as a priority political, social and economic challenge. Issues associated with youth unemployment in the Pacific are among the most difficult of employment issues, not least because they are, in large part, the result of a demographic trend that means there are significantly more potential workers entering the working age population every year than there are jobs available in the formal, domestic labour market.

As relatively inexperienced potential employees, youth occupy a particularly vulnerable place in the labour market and can struggle to access limited job opportunities, or, in weak economies, retain jobs. The consequences of youth unemployment are long-lasting, with low-skilled young unable to obtain employment, education or training being more at risk of unemployment in adulthood (IEG 2012: 6).

The policy complexity of youth employment challenges means that policy responses must be long-term and broad-fronted. According to the World Bank (2012: 5):

*'The socioeconomic context is important in addressing the youth employment challenge. Where economic policies are stable and market institutions well developed, youth-targeted interventions are likely to have a greater impact. Where there is a large youth bulge, little formal employment, and a large low-wage or informal economy, lifetime poverty traps are a threat and youth-targeted interventions may be less effective.'*

A range of complex labour demand and supply issues influence youth employment outcomes. Labour demand issues are those influencing employer demands for workers, and include factors shaping employer requirements for labour in general, and young employees in particular. One of the most important factors influencing youth employment prospects is the macroeconomic environment. Growing economies generally support higher levels of employment. The structure of an economy also influences the type of jobs available and whether those jobs provide stable, formalised employment opportunities, or sustain largely irregular and insecure types of work. For example, developed, industrialised economies tend to require higher skilled workers who are employed in jobs that are generally better paying and more secure. Conversely, developing country economies that are reliant on agricultural and primary production generally require more low skilled jobs. Economies undergoing transition from a principally agriculture base to manufacturing and industrial production face new demands for skilled workers. From a demand perspective, therefore, the best way for states to support youth employment is to create conditions favourable to broad-based economic growth, through effective macro and microeconomic management and the provision of political stability. In the case of the Pacific, where economic growth generating options are constrained by a range of factors, including remoteness from major markets and narrow distribution of economic benefits from natural resource development, integration into larger labour markets is also a key factor influencing employment opportunities. This means, therefore, that many of the significant policies that are of relevance to youth employment may have little direct focus on "youth".

On the supply side (where young people enter the labour market looking for employment), there are a variety of factors affecting youth employment outcomes. These include personal traits, education qualifications, skills development and employment experience. Young people can find it very difficult to amass skills in demand, and behaviours and experience that make them competitive for available jobs. Labour market discrimination may make it even harder for particular youth groups, such as women and young people with disabilities, to access education, training and employment opportunities. Large youth population bulges in many developing countries including the Pacific can compound these supply side challenges, forcing more young people to compete for too few jobs, and putting pressure on inadequately resourced education and skills-development institutions. Competition amongst young people may also mean those able to find work must do so at much low wage rates.

Countries develop labour market institutions to mediate labour demand and supply. The nature of these institutions are influenced by their diverse economic development histories and political economies. Developed economies have strong and extensive labour market institutions that engage with different parts of the labour market (tertiary and vocational training, basic and secondary education, industrial relations, trade unions). Developing labour markets often lack strong institutions, reflecting the informal nature of large parts of the labour market and the broader economy. Key institutional deficits in developing countries include education and training institutions capable of equipping young people with skills demanded by dynamic labour markets.

A particularly important institutional deficit can be the absence of labour market information systems critical for the development of evidence based policies and programs and provide information to young people about current and future jobs. The absence of up-to-date national databases of skilled and qualified young people looking for work from which employers can source locally available human resources is also a challenge in many Pacific Islands countries. The absence or weakness of labour market information systems can result in a mismatch between labour supply and demand, such that countries with high levels of (youth) unemployment may concurrently experience high levels of unmet employment demand in particular sectors or job categories. This can also lead to the hiring of foreign workers to fill position despite availability of locally qualified young people.

A critical policy challenge for many developing countries is to construct responsive labour market institutions that respond to emerging labour market opportunities in a timely manner. Doing so requires taking a holistic approach to labour market development, including the structure and orientation of training and education institutions and the nature of government policy development, including human resource planning. It also requires some consideration of the degree to which institutions are inclusive and encourage broad-based stakeholder engagement, or exclusive, for example favouring labour market insiders. Labour market institutions can operate in ways that favour a few, well placed – usually skilled employees – at the expense of the broader pool of workers. Inclusive labour market institutions seek to facilitate effective labour market transitions for non-employed into employment – oftentimes through education and training pathways – and from low productive (declining) to higher productive (growing) labour market sectors.

One development of particular relevance to youth employment in the Pacific is the regionalisation of labour markets. The Pacific labour market has been notable for the long-term importance of employment in metropolitan labour markets, such as Australia and New Zealand. Labour migration (seasonal and permanent) has been a key part of the economic development model for Polynesian countries, reflected in established institutional labour migration structures, large diasporas and the significance of remittances to their economies. Regional labour market participation has resulted in remittances serving as a key part of some Pacific island countries' economies. While regional labour markets have been a long-term historical feature of the regional economy, key economies in the region have recently moved to expand and institutionalise regional labour market integration opportunities, particularly for Melanesian workers. The integration of regional labour markets raises a host of questions and reform issues for sending (Pacific islands) countries and their capacity to respond to regional employment opportunities as they become available.

Owing to the already significant number of young people participating in the labour force – youth labour force participation rates in the Pacific range from 28-58 per cent – and the size of the potential young labour force across the region, youth labour markets should be recognised as a significant sub-sector of the broader labour market (SPC 2015). Within the broad sphere of youth employment issues, policymakers should also recognise that there are distinct sub-labour markets. For example, early school leavers seeking employment will face particular challenges that may centre more on priming demand and providing opportunities for basic skills in high demand. High skilled tertiary graduates are affected by a different suite of policy issues, including the quality of education and the provision of education and training that responds to formal employment opportunities.

## The Politics of Employment

The politics of youth employment and the associated challenges of supporting a transformational reform program to improve youth employment prospects are complex, reflecting the broad-fronted nature of the youth employment problem. Policymakers and Pacific communities are concerned about youth employment and there is a common rhetoric across the region regarding the need to address youth employment, evidenced by the Pacific Forum Leaders' recognition of youth employment as a priority policy issue in 2011. Youth employment was again addressed at the SPC 2013 Meeting of Pacific Ministers of Youth and Sport at which Ministers endorsed the then draft Pacific Youth Development Framework (2014-2023), called for action on youth employment, and considered strategies to improve employment opportunities for youth in the Pacific recommended by the ILO, which included increased education and training opportunities and providing employment services to young people (SPC 2013a). Another call for action on youth employment was made at the 2014 Small Island Development States Conference, with leaders calling on member states to promote the creation of more decent employment opportunities for youth (United Nations 2014).

Despite these commitments, as well as commitments made by most national governments to address youth employment, there are few examples of effective policy action leading to improved labour market outcomes for young people. This highlights the political and technical complexity of the youth employment challenge, the challenge of translating general political commitments into tangible reforms and policy actions, and lags between key support programs (such as improving education and training institutions) and improved employment outcomes.

There a number of issues of relevance to addressing youth employment issues that could/does form the basis of a reform/donor support program. These include measures to support general macro-economic management and the broad suite of economic and governance issues that impact national economic growth prospects. Issues related to human capital and skills development may warrant a focus on education and training, which in turn may lead to policy interventions focused on improving access to education and training opportunities, improving the quality of education, and ensuring governance arrangements of the skills development system support demand-driven skills development so as to maximise employment prospects. However while these technical issues and reform options are readily apparent, the politics of such reforms and the mobilisation of political action to progress them in substantive ways is more challenging.

Improving employment opportunities presents complex collective action problems, particularly in developing country contexts. Young people seeking employment are generally uncoordinated (indeed, are competitors for limited jobs), are disempowered (lacking valued skills with which to exercise privileged labour market demands) and lack information and experience that would better enable them to make informed judgements about emerging employment sectors most likely to provide jobs and the skill requirements to benefit from such jobs. Youth organisations generally lack resources or capacity to empower young people to engage with emerging employment opportunities or to advocate with government for broad policy reforms to improve general economic conditions and labour market institutions. Instead, many youth organisations focus on lower skilled, lower end employment issues such as basic job readiness activities (CV writing). This is rational given the need for such services and high demand from a disadvantaged youth populations, and donor and NGO incentives to achieve measurable results relating to discrete activities and within set timeframes.

In industrialised capitalist economies, the labour market has historically been one of the factors driving institutional reform and influencing economic development. Mass, factory-based production created specific employment conditions that prompted overt collective action from workers who formed trade unions to demand improvements in working conditions, wage rates and skills development. This, in turn, forced employers and governments to respond with a suite of policies to increase job opportunities, productivity and profitability of businesses. In Australia, for example, high tariff barriers were established to improve the profitability of employers so they could afford to pay for higher wage, higher skilled workers. In Pacific island countries, labour has also been an important historical factor in establishing institutional settings. The availability of labour was key in the establishment of political economies of expatriate-owned agricultural plantations supporting and supported by colonial administrations. The organisation of labour was also important to the development of post-colonial identity.

In developing countries, the nature of the economy and associated labour market is more fragile and precarious, making it more difficult to organise. The subsistence and informal nature of much of the labour market demands high numbers of relatively unskilled, and therefore substitutable, workers. At the same time, labour demand for semi-skilled and skilled workers tends to be equally fragmented and diffuse. It is difficult for agricultural producers, for example, to recognise common interests and to make institutional claims for specific support to improve labour productivity in their sectors. Employers in low skilled markets tend to view labour issues in terms of cost rather than quality, limiting employer interests in skills development. The relatively limited demand for skilled workers in Pacific island countries' economies means that employers lack collective interests that would warrant large-scale investments in skills development. As such, there is limited coordinated signalling to labour market training institutions regarding the provision of education and training. Many large-scale employers with specific skilled labour needs who consider that local education and training institutions do not provide the skills they demand internalise training and staff development.

In the absence of strong collective employee or employer action, governments and donors can be expected to play a greater role in driving and mobilising reform. Governments are responding to employment challenges with mixed successes, both in terms of general macroeconomic and microeconomic management, institutional strengthening programs and focused youth employment initiatives. While most Pacific island countries have built or inherited a broad range of recognisable labour market institutions, many face major challenges in terms of labour market governance and institutional performance, which limits the responsiveness of labour market institutions to employment opportunities. Often it has been not indigenous factors but external actors – previously colonial labour officers, currently multilateral and bilateral expertise – which have driven change in labour institutions.

Where governments are expected to play a leadership role in driving collective responses to youth employment issues, governance challenges facing many Pacific islands governments can become significant impediments in the development of strategic and long-term policy solutions. In many cases the Department or Ministry of Youth is under-resourced and has low capacities to engage at the policy level, let alone develop demand driven sustainable youth employment programs. Therefore, their engagement is restricted to sports and cultural activities. There is also a lack of coordination between relevant government ministries e.g. youth, labour, commerce and between these ministries and the private sector and educational/training institutions. Donors are investing heavily in providing technical support to assist Pacific islands governments to improve labour market regulation and education and training quality and access. Bilateral partners are also directly labour demand as they increase access to domestic labour markets, which should provide incentives for Pacific islands governments to reform labour market institutions to support labour export.



## Principles for PLP's engagement with youth employment

The most important principle that should guide donors seeking to support youth employment issues is to recognise that the issue can only be understood in the context of broader labour market issues that are dependent on a broad range of integrated economic, social and political factors. Donors wanting to be active in this space must seek to make a contribution to a much larger development program.

As a development program focused largely on supporting individuals, groups and coalitions to pursue collective action to achieve development change, PLP can expect to play only a modest and niche role in engaging with youth employment challenges across the Pacific. It is not within PLP's mandate or capacity to provide large-scale active employment programs (although PLP has played a significant role in supporting targeted job ready programs such as Youth at Work in Solomon Islands). Instead, PLP should look to provide support in ways that build on its program strengths: helping developmental leaders (youth advocates, government officials, workers and employers representatives) to engage constructively and in politically nuanced ways with complex policy issues; helping convene diverse groups of stakeholders to recognise their collective interests in specific policy issues; and helping to empower reform coalitions with targeted support that will enable them to work politically in pursuit of a specific reform agenda. In the case of youth employment, such strengths suggest PLP would be best placed to engage with a few institutional reform issues. Given PLP's convening power – the ability to bring diverse networks of interested stakeholders together – PLP could be particularly well placed to engage with communication and coordination issues central to general issues of labour market information exchange and the mediation of supply and demand factors.

It is important to recognise youth employment is a crowded field in the region. There are several development organisations - technical agencies, bilateral, multilateral donors and national and international non-government organisations - with significant youth employment programs. Recognising the need for close collaboration between the many actors working in this space to promote coordinated programming, the Youth Employment component of the Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014-23 (PYDF) specifies priority areas for engagement and agencies that are working in each area. If PLP is to provide support for youth employment, it would benefit from doing so in collaboration with donors and technical agencies and focussing on agreed gaps in support.

# SOLOMON ISLANDS YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCAN

## Labour market context

Solomon Islands has a very young population with 2009 census data showing that some 45 per cent of the adult population were aged between 15 to 29 years (Curtain 2013: 10). Young people in Solomon Islands are vulnerable, particularly urban youth detached from their traditional and family support structures. Young people face significant challenges obtaining formal employment in Solomon Islands. The formal labour market is small in Solomon Islands, reflecting the fragility of its economy and the dominance of subsistence and informal sectors. Labour market data is poor, making it difficult to cite definitive figures for employment, unemployment and labour force participation. The ILO's 2008 Decent Work Country Programme report on Solomon Islands notes that the number of people in paid work in 2004 was some 57,000 of which 11,000 were employed in public sector jobs (p.60). In such an environment, Close (2012: 10) observes that 'young people account for a larger share of unemployment and informal employment.' Close refers to Farchy's 2011 study that 'suggests that youth make up 23 per cent of the labour force, but their share in unemployment is over 34 per cent' (Close 2012: 10). The ILO's Decent Work Country Programme report on Solomon Islands cites 1999 data that the share of youth unemployment in total unemployment was 42.4 per cent (ILO 2008: 6).

Solomon Islands faces significant economic constraints in its ability to grow sufficiently and in ways to create enough jobs for its population. Solomon Islands' economy has grown reasonably well since RAMSI's arrival in 2003 (Haque (2013: 1) notes per capita output in Solomon Islands grew 3.6 per cent from 2003 to 2013, which compares well to other small islands Pacific economies at 0.6 per cent). But growth has not translated into significant formal employment or structural shifts in economic production leading to a higher employment economic structure. There are very different labour markets across the country, reflecting the economic basis of the labour market.

The primary sector, encompassing agriculture – including subsistence agriculture – and timber production, dominates the Solomon Islands economy. But the sector provides informal, irregular and precarious employment opportunities for young people. It is also not a preferred option for young people or their parents. Solomon Islands has a small urban economy, based on the public sector. Public sector jobs form the basis of Solomon Islands' social protection system; they carry high status, and are the priority objective of the country's education pathways. The country has a modest private sector, with a small number of large, formalized firms and the vast majority being semi-formal or informal businesses operating on the margins of the cash economy.

Prospects for future growth are constrained and the better prospects for job-creating economic development will require careful economic management and long-term investments in productive capacity. Export dependency on commodities, and unsustainable logging, combined with high population growth rates, make current economic growth fragile and unsustainable over the long term. Poor infrastructure and inefficient government services further undermine growth prospects and the emergence of a modernizing private sector.

There are few obvious future sources of growth that could compensate for diminishing commodity production. These might include mining, tourism, modest service sector development and participation in regional labour market regimes. The latter, including seasonal worker schemes provided by Australia and New Zealand, provide arguably the most promising opportunity for formal employment gains for Solomon Islanders, including young people. But benefitting from regional employment opportunities will require strategic policy development and significant investments in skills. Despite desperate need for such opportunities, Solomon Islands has fallen far behind its neighbours in benefiting from these schemes, due mainly to binding constraints of institutional capacity and bureaucratic clientelism. Realising these opportunities will be difficult and will require strong leadership from Solomon Islands policy-makers and good partnerships with a range of donors.

Paradoxically, whilst the formal labour market is small relative to the number of young people entering the labour market, there are nevertheless significant employment gaps where employer demand cannot be met by the pool of available workers. According to the World Bank (Close 2012: 3), 'there is a serious skills deficit in Solomon Islands, constraining its people from taking advantage of the economic opportunities available to them.' A study by Curtain (2013) points to employer identified skills shortages in Solomon Islands, most notably in trades and professional jobs. An inability to fill such jobs with suitable Solomon Islands candidates has forced employers to look overseas. Responding to this mismatch, and emerging employment opportunities such as regional labour markets, will depend on the ability of policy-makers to improve education access, quality and the responsiveness of key labour market institutions to respond to the job-relevant skills mismatch and labour demand (Close 2012: 4).

The challenges faced by the Solomon Islands economy to provide sufficient employment opportunities has increased policy interest on prospects for greater entrepreneurialism and private sector development (including on the part of youth people and their representative organisations). Such prospects face significant governance challenges, with existing business regulatory regimes, access to finance and the broader regulatory environment including access to land imposing significant challenges.

Experience in Solomon Islands shows a disconnect between small-scale enterprise and broader processes of economic modernization and productivity enhancement. Indigenous business expansion could expand employment, but face multiple barriers of economies of scale and a lack of investment, poor business and banking skills, high input costs, social networks and obligations, and competition from expatriate business. Important questions remain about whether support for small-scale enterprise development can be scaled up to provide sufficient economic activity to improve employment.

Solomon Islands makes significant investments in its supply of skills, but due to inefficiency and distribution of this investment, the investment does not yield satisfactory returns from employment. Solomon Islands' school system struggles to provide quality education to students transitioning through the education system in preparation for work. Enrolment has increased, both at primary and early secondary levels over the last decade. However, education quality remains a significant issue and many school leavers leave school functionally illiterate and innumerate. Secondary enrolment is a problem with low completion rates and 'high push' out rates – when young people are forced out of secondary school due to a shortage of places (Close 2012: 20).

Transitions from school to the few vocational or tertiary training institutions are difficult and do not support a dynamic labour market (Close 2012). There is no facilitation for transitions to work and from unskilled to skilled employment, or in supporting economic growth through the provision of productive employees. Relative to population, education and training opportunities are limited. For example, according to Close (2012: 23), 'Solomon Islands' capacity to provide quality, short-term training of relevance to employers is estimated at 2,000-3,000 students per year in RTCs [Regional Training Centres] for which youth demand well exceeds the supply of places.' Close continues, 'tertiary education is strongly associated with employment, however, in 2011, only 1,720 students, or around one per cent of total enrolments, were in tertiary education' (2012: 23). While tertiary education is strongly related to likelihood of employment, education and training outcomes are often of poor quality, such that the system struggles to produce job-ready graduates with demanded employment skills that would lead to employment. Students leave high school with poor personal and life skills important to their employment and job retention and skills development prospects.

Governance arrangements for education and training institutions are weak. Solomon Islands lack strong institutions capable of responding to the labour market challenge in its totality. Its education system is improving, but many students do not leave the school system with job ready skills. Vocational training institutions, such as the Solomon Islands National University (SINU) and the RTCs - are under-resourced and do not provide training in sufficient quantities, or in areas where there are demonstrable skill shortages and to an adequate quality. Tertiary training is expensive and resources for scholarships and tertiary study are not clearly aligned with labour market need or a long-term strategic human resource plan. Finally, training tends to be supply driven rather than responsive to employment demand, meaning there is a mismatch between employment and skills.

As a policy challenge, there are many dimensions to youth employment in Solomon Islands, but it can be understood as having two broad dimensions. The first centres on supporting the economy to generate sufficient employment opportunities for young people entering the labour market. This requires a broad fronted economic development and reform program to address. At the same time, the country's education and training institutions need to be strengthened and oriented to demand to ensure young people will be job ready and capable of benefiting from employment opportunities as they arise, including abroad.

## Key developmental actors and developmental leaders

From a development perspective, youth employment as a broadly understood policy issue is a field crowded with actors, but lacking holistic agents of policy change. The scale and multi-fronted nature of the youth employment problem means there are many individuals, groups and organisations in Solomon Islands that have an interest in the issue. These can be broken down to organisations "directly" engaged in youth issues, with youth employment a subset of a broader youth agenda, and a much wider range of organisations with general interests in issues of indirect importance to youth employment, such as in economic reform, private sector development and education and training. Each of these groups is differently positioned to exercise prospective developmental leadership around a youth employment reform agenda, depending on the specific issue and the associated reform politics.

The following section considers major groups and organisations of relevance to the issue of youth employment, and the degree to which they are poised to exercise developmental leadership to progress significant policy reforms to improve employment outcomes. The following section should not be read as a definitive list of stakeholders, but rather a brief snapshot of the organizational terrain in which developmental leadership should be considered.

## Solomon Islands Government

Youth employment has been a policy priority for successive governments in Solomon Islands. The Democratic Coalition for change Government Policy Statement lists the generation of 'jobs and increased employment opportunities for the growing population' and achieving 'high economic growth, wealth and social wellbeing for all Solomon Islanders' as a priority (DCC 2015: 10).

There are a number of ministries responsible for youth employment issues. Formally, youth issues including employment has been understood as the principal responsibility of the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs (MWYCA). MWYCA has a small youth division and allocates only limited resources for youth issues, of which employment is one subset. MWYCA is seeking to play a leadership role in overseeing some key youth employment initiatives, such as the Youth at Work program supported by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) (see below). MWYCA does not play an active role in broader youth employment policy issues such as tertiary and vocational training or broader education, labour or economic policy, despite these being the significant constraints to youth prospects in the country.

The Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination (MDPAC) has responsibility for strategic labour planning. MDPAC has played an important role in building a coordinated approach to labour planning and training which is of direct relevance to youth employment. MDPAC has led in the establishment of a National Human Resource Development & Training Council and the finalisation of a National Human Resources Development & Training Plan, which was endorsed by Cabinet in 2013 and, if implemented, will play an important role in driving a strategic approach to TVET issues of particular relevance to young people. However limited institutional support and competing priorities for aid coordination have prevented MDPAC's advance of this agenda.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) is responsible for education policy including vocational training and tertiary education. It has a key role to play in managing education institutions from basic through to tertiary education. These have direct implications for skills development and training opportunities and outcomes. The Solomon Islands government faces many challenges in improving access to education and education outcomes across basic through to tertiary training institutions. Within this broad portfolio, governance and institutional fragmentation complicates prospects for a strategic approach to policy coordination, including through the development of a demand-driven skills development framework.

The Ministry of Finance and Treasury (MoFT) is one of the most important central ministries and has general responsibility for macroeconomic policy and thus influencing general economic conditions relevant to employment outcomes. The Ministry of Commerce has a general interest in economic development and supporting the needs of the private sector. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has carriage of seasonal worker issues, being responsible for labour mobility aspects of the scheme. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration (MoCILI) includes institutional responsibilities for labour but has been institutionally weak, focusing on trades testing and immigrant work permits, but with issues of transparency and a lack of policies or programs relevant to addressing youth employment.

While there are many government agencies of relevance to youth employment, governance arrangements across the Solomon Islands Government do not support concerted policy development across youth employment issues. Translating these policy commitments into specific outcomes is more difficult. In particular, there are significant tensions between stated policy priorities and budget allocations. Traditions of cross-ministry coordination are also relatively poor, such that prospects for developing a coordinated, demand-driven approach to employment development encompassing skills, education and training are limited. Experience has shown the inverse relationship between degree of institutional fragmentation and likelihood of effective developmental leadership.

## Vocational and training organisations

Solomon Islands has a number of tertiary and vocational training institutions that have a mandated role to support skills development in Solomon Islands. The country has a growing tertiary sector, including a campus of the University of the South Pacific (USP), a small campus of PNG's Divine Word University and the newly established SINU, which was established by an Act of Parliament in 2012. SINU is a mixed vocational and tertiary institution, having incorporated the former Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) - the country's main vocational training college. SINU was established in response to government frustrations at under-investments by USP in tertiary education and as an expression of a long-held desire for Solomon Islands to build a national university (Barbara and Walsh 2015). SINU has ambitious plans to develop a range of diploma and degree level courses, and has plans to develop a range of short courses tailored to private sector needs, but faces significant resourcing and capacity issues if it is to deliver quality education to its students. USP is a major provider of tertiary education for Solomon Islands youth. USP has a small, under-resourced Honiara campus which it is looking to expand. Many scholarship recipients in Solomon Islands attend USP courses.

Solomon Islands has a wider vocational training sector, centred on its 43 training centres, mandated to provide rural-focused training opportunities for rural-based job seekers. The centres are expected to provide a 'second chance' for the rural majority of students constrained from highly selective senior secondary and tertiary education, yet have been disadvantaged in funding in favour of more prestigious tertiary scholarships and provision. Run mainly by church-based education authorities, the centres have met costs from a mix of government salary payment and small enterprise, limited by rural locations and poor resourcing from investing in higher-quality skills provision. The centres help achieve Solomon Islands' independence era-erasure of locally-relevant, Pacific education, in contrast to donor-supported formal education, but fail to equip young people for choices and pathways reflecting modern aspirations of urbanisation and participation in the cash economy. The dichotomy thus entrenches inequity with an advantaged tertiary-educated urban elite. Flexibility and responsiveness to changing employment needs has rarely been prioritized, with the exception of isolated individual champions.

Solomon Islands vocational and training institutions face three major challenges impeding prospects for supporting improved youth employment outcomes. The first is the sheer number of young people looking to participate in education and training programs: demand-responsive training supply has remained constant at under 5,000 places per year, there are over 60,000 youth 'push-outs' (Close 2012). The second is the quality of education and training provided to students, which does not prepare many for the labour market or position them to capitalize on emerging employment opportunities.

The third centres on governance and the challenges in pursuing an integrated response to youth employment issues. The TVET sector also faces significant strategic planning and coordination challenges including a broad need for clear and strategic leadership and to ensure existing TVET institutions are more responsive to employer demands. Solomon Islands is trying to develop a more coordinated TVET policy framework, establishing a National Human Resources Development & Training Plan and Solomon Islands Qualifications Framework to integrate TVET and skills training with education. The NHRDTP includes a commitment to move away from state-driven manpower planning to a more strategic, flexible and responsive approach to skills development. The NHRDTP includes a commitment to strengthen coordination arrangements in the skills development space. It invests the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination with the leading coordination role, including with a direction to encourage private sector participation in skills development and prioritization. It also requires coordination with the proposed National Advisory Board for Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Re-orienting Solomon Islands' TVET system so it is more demand-driven and likely to equip students with needed skills will be a long-term challenge. According to a recent review of the education sector conducted by DFAT (Government of Australia 2014a: 69), '[t]he interrelationship between authorities responsible for TVET is not clear or well established', nor are connections between employers, government and training providers. Solomon Islands does not have a strong tradition of tripartite coordination between employers, government and unions and there is no evident peak body that could play a strong leadership role in coordinating relevant organisations in line with agreed TVET and employment priorities. MEHRD is currently reviewing management and quality-assurance structures for post-secondary education and training, with a view to developing new structures including a Tertiary Education Commission and Qualifications Authority to improve coordination between public and private organisations with interests in skills demand and supply. In 2015, progress and resourcing of these initiatives is uncertain, awaiting delayed MEHRD restructure and passing of a revised Education Bill. While an intention to address youth employment outcomes can be assumed, replication of such Australian/ New Zealand-oriented structures in a Pacific island governance context faces uncertain success considering mixed experience in the region and the difficulty of cross-sector leadership in Solomon Islands. Limited collective action and representation by employers, and lack of ownership by employers of these new structures, are further challenges.

## Employers

Employers can have a significant impact on youth employment as demanders of skilled labour. Employers have political interests in youth employment as an economic and social issue. The availability of suitably skilled young people can affect the growth prospects of their businesses. The business community also has a general interest in economic management, with good economic governance and proactive policies creating positive conditions for private sector growth and profitability.

That said, the private sector is not monolithic and different parts of the business community have different interests, including in skills development and youth employment. This in turn effects the way in which the private sector organizes to protect its interests. The formalised private sector may have strong interests in training and skills development and thus incentives to advocate and pursue national investments in education and TVET. In contrast, the timber industry may have little interest in youth employment and the productivity of local employees, and its primary political interests may be in insulating its commercial interests from strong political oversight and increased tax burdens (see Hameiri 2012). As a general rule, Solomon Islands does not have a strong employer representative infrastructure capable of playing a strong role in encouraging a more responsive skills development system. Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), which represents many of the country's largest firms including those in the formal private sector, has an ostensible interest in skills development and youth employment and has expressed frustration at the lack of job ready and/or suitably qualified employees.



This has forced large employers to train in-house and/or recruit skilled staff from overseas. However, SICCI has yet to position itself organizationally to play a strong role in the development of a demand-driven skills system and has not been a strong public advocate on employment issues in general. Government efforts to improve tripartite coordination of employment issues, and to develop a demand-driven skills system, will provide a focus for employer engagement and may elicit more political organization on behalf of employers. Instead, large firms have tended to internalize training and skills development solutions, or recruit skilled staff from overseas. Fragmented development partner initiatives also compete to attract the attention of the few existing forums for private sector collective action.

It will be interesting to see if the opening of regional labour markets, including through seasonal worker schemes, will see Australian employers and their representative bodies exert some influence on local TVET over time. However, with thirteen Pacific Island Countries competing for such opportunities, and countries like Tonga and Samoa bearing a 'first-mover advantage', specific development leadership will be required for Solomon Islands to overcome institutional constraints and attract Australian employers to work in a challenging context.

## Civil Society

There are a number of youth organisations in Solomon Islands who have either an express or general interest in youth employment issues. Youth organisations in Solomon Islands have tended to understand and engage with youth employment issues in personalized and individual ways, treating employment issues in terms of individual agency (improving individual employability) at the expense of engagement with the structural impediments and opportunities that might improve overall youth employment opportunities.

There are a small number of youth groups focused on supporting young people to transition to work, either by improving their job search skills (resume writing, interview techniques, job match) or supporting youth entrepreneurialism. For example, the Youth at Work program, funded by PLP and supported by SPC, provides mentoring, skills training and facilitates internship placements for unemployed young people. Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII) has expressed an interest in supporting returning graduates to access appropriate employment opportunities in Solomon Islands on their return. A new alumni association has been established, with support from DFAT, which, amongst other things, will seek to support study-employment transitions for returning overseas graduates.

There are no youth organisations in Solomon Islands presently involved in broader policy reform debates relevant to youth employment, such as current debates on the establishment of a demand-driven TVET system or efforts to improve the operation of the seasonal worker program. Limited "youth" engagement in these long-term structural reform debates presumably reflects the complexity of the issues involved and limited youth organization technical understanding of the issues involved, the broad-fronted nature of the reform challenge (making targeted political engagement difficult), the generally muted national policy debate currently underway in Solomon Islands on youth employment issues, and the limited engagement infrastructure that might be used to include youth representatives in national policy debates.

## Donors and technical agencies

The main way in which donors are engaging with youth employment issues is indirectly through support for education and skills development. Australian and New Zealand are major supporters of education and skills development programs, with the European Union also active in the area, particularly around vocational training.

Australia's new Solomon Islands Education Sector Program foreshadows major investments in basic education and skills development, the latter including a focus on strengthening national education systems through the construction of appropriate national institutions to support demand-driven skills formation (Government of Australia 2014a: vi). There is an established sector wide approach to ensure a coordinated approach between the Solomon Islands Government and Australia and New Zealand in the provision of support to MEHRD for basic and secondary education.

The World Bank has had a strong focus on (youth) employment in Solomon Islands. This includes through the provision of technical policy to support the development of a demand-driven skills development system (Close 2012). The World Bank is working with policy makers to improve analytical understanding and develop policy capabilities of Solomon Islands stakeholders. The World Bank's Rapid Employment Project (2010-2016) is an emergency employment program targeting vulnerable communities in Honiara. Not a specific youth program, it has nevertheless been found to benefit youth, providing them with job-ready skills training, short-term work experience and cash (Close 2012: 42).

The ILO, through the Human Security Trust Fund (HSTF) project, has provided technical assistance to Youth at Work, Honiara Youth Council/City Council and the Ministry of Education in the areas of entrepreneurship training and career counselling. The technical assistance targeted capacity building of staff, development of materials and institutionalization of the programmes for availability for young people both in and out of school.

SPC and the Solomon Islands Government implement a Youth at Work program, which seeks to support youth labour market participation including by supporting a short-term internship program, and providing training, mentoring and post-placement support (PLP 2015). Youth at Work was initially supported by PLP and now receives assistance under Australia's bilateral development program.

## Prospects for Developmental Leadership and the Politics of Reform

The politics of reform in support of improved youth employment outcomes in Solomon Islands is complicated by the broad-fronted nature of the youth employment reform challenge, the wide number of stakeholders needed to drive a reform program, weak incentives to demand significant change on behalf of key stakeholders, and poor institutional structures to encourage and channel collective action in productive directions over the long term.

There are three major challenges complicating prospects for developmental leadership: the absence of obvious developmental leaders to demand and drive a reform agenda; weak institutional structures (rules of the game, see Barbara and Haley 2014) to support collective action; and a complicated political economy regarding youth employment and training (games within the rules).

It should be noted that recommendations in this Solomon Islands section go into considerably more detail compared to recommendations made in other country reviews. This is because subsequent reviews make similar recommendations where relevant and do not require as much detail.

### Who will exercise developmental leadership?

There is a fundamental issue of who is best placed to exercise developmental leadership in pursuit of significant reform. With respect to skills development, technical consensus is that skills development systems in the Pacific should be demand-driven (ADB 2008: 125). While reform needs to be demand-driven, it is difficult to see how such demand will be expressed politically in support of collective action. For example, while youth organisations have played a constructive role at an individual level, working with donors to improve job search, placement and employability of young people, such groups are not well positioned to participate in long-term, structural dimensions of the youth employment challenge, such as long-term reform of TVET institutions. Employers also have diverse interests which may not coalesce into a coherent reform program. For example, the formal private sector is relatively small and incentives to pursue collective action in support of long-term investments in skills development are not strong. Many large employers currently internalize the cost of training. Agricultural sector demand for improved farming skills exists but the diffuse nature of the sector – both geographically and in terms of enterprise scale – makes it difficult to aggregate policy engagement in support of large scale structural reform. A shift in financing structures from supply- to demand-orientation will also prove challenging.

Absent clear common agendas and strong collective interests, it will be important for the government to play a significant leadership role in promoting long-term policy reform to improve the responsiveness and quality of TVET institutions in Solomon Islands. Ideally, such leadership would include a focus on establishing structures to encourage employer and community participation in a reform process. Currently the Australian government and international technical advisors are providing a prime motive force, in coalition with individual champions at the technical level of government and training institutions.

### Supporting institutional framework

The institutional framework of most relevance to youth employment in Solomon Islands does not encourage an inclusive and integrated policy approach by encouraging broad stakeholder collaboration. This is best reflected in the absence of an agreed policy framework, articulated by government, to drive a coordinated, long-term approach to reform issues; and the absence of an effective coordination framework that facilitates collaboration and consensus building amongst disparate actors.

This is most evident in the skills and education space, which is potentially the most significant policy issue that will impact on youth employment outcomes over the long term. DFAT's (2014) draft Solomon Islands Investment Program proposal lists a number of country and sector level impediments to policy development and reform in the TVET area, specifically around an agreed reform approach and necessary consensus amongst disparate stakeholders to implement such an approach. According to the report:

*While a large number of policies have been drafted in relation to the general education sub-sector, this has not been the case with TVET. In the absence of an agreed policy framework within which to operate, it is very difficult for personnel with limited TVET experience to interpret a reform agenda, to see the inter-relationships between component parts and to develop a coherent approach to program implementation. There are also habits to break around delivering a supply driven model for the last 50 years since the colonial era through either government or churches with no linkages to industry needs. (Government of Australia 2014: 8)*

The report identifies the need to 'build consensus among key stakeholders on the shared vision that underlines a shift to a more demand-led, competency based and quality-assured TVET system.' At the same time, it notes that '[c]reating structures and legislation to facilitate the transformation of the system is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for success.' (Government of Australia 2014: 9). In itself, this vision focused on TVET neglects the non-TVET interventions needed for the youth workforce to better transition to employment, including opportunities for remedial education to gain a necessary basis of cognitive skills, and the range of employment preparation and services required by young people in the school-to-work transition. There is a tension between efforts to foster broad stakeholder engagement around youth employment issues whilst waiting for stakeholder leadership to demand more responsive institutions.

### The fraught political economy of labour market reform

The final issue is the complex politics associated with key reform challenges of relevance to youth employment. This plays out in a number of ways. Logging firms, for example, have little interest in formalising employment arrangements in the sector and work actively to protect the sector from significant government oversight (Hameiri 2012). Employment and access to training opportunities forms an important part of Solomon Islands patronage politics. This is best evident in the high scholarship spend in Solomon Islands and public controversy about the allocation of scholarships. Close has observed the skewing of scarce education budgets in favour of overseas tertiary scholarships, which benefits elite families disproportionately and results in under-investments in local TVET institutions and programs (Close 2012). For many Solomon Islanders – particularly those who are positioned to lead and advocate policy reform, who have benefited personally – the country's significant investment in tertiary scholarships itself constitutes the most important intervention to support youth employment. Overcoming this political settlement to redistribute such investment to instead benefit the vast majority of youth excluded from this investment is a difficult proposition with few champions or prospects of collective action.

Increased constituency funding has reinforced an individualized model of service delivery, including through the provision of scholarships to constituency members. This means that local politics manifests in ways which undermine prospects for a coordinated approach to policy reform to address structural deficits limiting youth employment prospects.

It should be noted there is general community interest in youth employment and issues around access to high quality training opportunities and employment. Controversy around the corruption allocation of scholarships led to a public inquiry by the Auditor General and is an area of public concern. There is high demand for urban-based training and general community concern about accessing TVET opportunities. The challenge is channelling such concern into productive and constrictive political action.

## Engagement Options

The above analysis underlines the very difficult politics of reform and the challenges of supporting collective action leading to improved employment outcomes for young people in Solomon Islands. The following recommendations are offered as entry points for PLP as it considers how it might make a contribution to the youth employment agenda in Solomon Islands. They are provided with the caveat that PLP should approach the issue recognizing its capacity to make a modest contribution, and the need to focus support where PLP has particular strengths and a recognized niche role as a development partner.

### Targeted support for youth organisations

A key challenge in Solomon Islands is supporting stakeholders to engage with the broad range of issues effecting youth employment in constructive ways.

In terms of youth organisations, there is a need for a more robust national youth council in Solomon Islands. The National Youth Council is weak and lacks capacity to engage with complex long-term reform issues. It also is removed from key debates on TVET and regional labour market engagement. PLP could provide targeted support to a group of young leaders, including those involved in the National Youth Council, to help such groups develop a more sophisticated and long-term understanding of the broad challenges involved with youth employment, including issues around institutional reform and demand-driven training. This would require PLP using its convening power to bring together youth leaders with relevant policy stakeholders and policy experts to learn about regional experiences with labour market reform and long-term labour market opportunities. This would potentially increase the capacity of youth representatives to play a more active role in demanding long-term investments and reforms in TVET institutions.

The MoWYCA has chaired a working group on youth employment with active leadership of key civil society partners including the SPC Youth at Work program. Such a focus on youth employment across institutions could be a valuable channel to shift the focus of agencies from services addressing high demand which respond to the symptoms of youth employment, to collective action to address causes.



In terms of fostering dialogue and collective action, one specific role for PLP could be to improve youth organisation understanding of labour market issues and opportunities broadly conceived. Youth groups inevitably focus on individual job search and readiness issues, and entrepreneurialism. However, they do not have a sophisticated understanding of emerging labour market development opportunities nor broader issues related to TVET access, equity and quality and how to engage in policy debates. PLP could support a workshop on the emerging labour market for youth leaders to expand youth organization horizons and which could form the basis of a technical support program as an adjunct to broader donor efforts in the TVET space.

A key part of such a support program could be centred on helping young people recognise better where emerging labour market opportunities lie, particularly with respect to regional employment opportunities, and how to access such opportunities. One critical youth employment challenge is helping young people make more informed choices about potential job opportunities. PLP could deploy a range of innovative strategies to this end. This could include supporting practical measures such as supporting a career fair for prospective vocational and tertiary students, which would showcase employers and job options/career pathways.

### Supporting development of a collective action infrastructure

The second, more difficult area for PLP to consider engaging will be in the area of policy dialogue and coordination, particularly around the TVET and skills development space. The absence of effective coordination and collaborative policy institutions is a significant impediment to the construction of a demand-driven reform program necessary for improved and job-relevant training. PLP support could be focused on supporting consensus building and dialogue amongst key stakeholders to build momentum between current efforts to strengthen sector governance and strategic planning around TVET issues. PLP's role would not be to identify policy solutions, but to use its networks and modest resources to foster stakeholder relationships and to help cohere stronger policy leadership. This could ideally be done by PLP looking to host a series of forums to bring policy makers and stakeholders together. PLP could, for example, look to host a stakeholder workshop with a focus on helping non-government stakeholders begin to engage with and learn about broader challenges involved in demand-driven TVET systems and to understand emerging labour market opportunities. Similar to the process used for the recent national land reform summit, PLP could sponsor the preparation of a youth employment report. The process by which such a report is prepared would be important, being led by local stakeholders and involving a research process that will build local ownership and stakeholder consensus about pathways to reform. Entry points and lines of dialogue to continue could include the Workforce Development assessment facilitated by the World Bank in 2014, which brought together training providers, policy makers and employers; and working with the Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands, to raise education sector awareness and constituency for improved labour market outcomes.

Solomon Islands has a range of strategic policies that commit the country to establishing a demand-driven TVET system. Formal coordination structures ostensibly established under such policies lack substance and policy influence – such as NHRTDP. Such policies do, however, provide an entry point for PLP, which might consider using its convening power to support a series of policy workshops designed to bring disparate stakeholders together (employers, government, youth) around training and employment issues.

While cross-sectoral dialogue on development issues does occur from time to time in Solomon Islands, often supported by development partners, the challenge is effective implementation of evidence-based actions agreed in such events. PLP would need to facilitate the availability of ongoing technical support and frameworks for progress and accountability. The agenda and reforms of the Core Economic Working Group through the Ministry of Finance and Treasury offer one example of this in Solomon Islands. The Skills for Economic Growth initiative supported by Australia provides an opportunity for ongoing technical support to demand-oriented reforms to skills development across sectors in Solomon Islands. Matching high-level leadership rhetoric around youth employment with sustained action across sectors may require effective leadership and implementation from the same high levels: such as the Office of the Prime Minister. Improving outcomes in youth employment means a more effective application of youth employment as a lens for new initiatives across government; rather than as a problem to be left for one- or two- institutionally weak agencies, or donor programs focused on service delivery.

This is a fraught area and one in which PLP should only look to provide modest support following close consultation with donors and Solomon Islands government. PLP is arguably well placed in its capacity to support collective action to encourage a more strategic and joined up policy approach to youth employment issues.

There could be a specific opportunity around the seasonal worker scheme, with governance arrangements in Solomon Islands – including coordination between Solomon Islands Government ministries and the role of recruitment agents – being disjointed, and youth understanding of the program and how to engage with it limited. PLP should consult with DFAT to see if the latter would like PLP to tailor a suite of outreach activities on seasonal worker participation.

# VANUATU YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCAN

## Labour market context

Vanuatu has a very young population and youth unemployment and under-employment is a significant economic, social and political issue. Of Vanuatu's total population of 230,000, some 50 per cent of the population is aged under 20 and around 25 per cent aged between 15 and 29 (Government of Australia 2012: 2). In 2012, the youth (15-24 years of age) share of the total working age population was 31.8 per cent. However those in paid work made up only 9 per cent of 15-19 year olds, 23 per cent of 20-24 year olds, and 28 per cent of 25-29 year olds. Those Not In Education, Employment or Training ('NEET') were 15, 27 and 26 per cent respectively (Government of Vanuatu/Curtain 2012). The youth bulge in Vanuatu means youth employment issues will continue to loom large in coming years.

Youth employment prospects in Vanuatu are shaped by the nature of the economy and the resultant demand for jobs. Vanuatu's economy, based upon agriculture and services, particularly tourism, has grown comparatively well (in a Pacific context) over the last decade but has not generated sufficient employment opportunities for young people. Moreover, the economy remains vulnerable, reflecting structural constraints associated with geographic isolation, territorial fragmentation, and a small population size which limits prospects for scale economies and local market development. Since 2007 Vanuatu has participated in the New Zealand and Australian seasonal migration schemes. These schemes are strengthening remittance incomes and have some potential to provide significant work for young people over time. Of the approximately 3,000 ni-Vanuatu who have accessed this opportunity, some 90 per cent are young people.

Compared to Solomon Islands, Vanuatu has a relatively large formal sector. In 2014, 38.5 per cent of Vanuatu's labour force was in formal employment (ADB 2014: 18). However, the number of formal jobs produced by the economy each year (some 700) is insufficient to soak up school leavers entering the labour market (some 3,500) (ILO 2009). Absent sufficient formal jobs, out-of-school youth must resort to village-based subsistence employment or urban-based informal employment. Both may provide livelihood benefits but are more vulnerable.

Vanuatu's youth face significant challenges in getting jobs when they enter the labour market. Vanuatu's school system does not adequately equip sufficient numbers of young people with the personal skills needed to help them win and keep jobs. The TVET system does not provide quality and demanded skills to young people, nor does it provide effective or adequate pathways to employment. Vanuatu's TVET system faces significant challenges in responding to emerging employment opportunities, such that Vanuatu suffers from skills gaps and high rates of (youth) unemployment. Even informal employment requires basic vocational and entrepreneurial skills (ILO 2009: 5).

Policy makers in Vanuatu recognize the importance of youth employment as a key issue and have developed a raft of policies to support youth employment. However, the government has struggled to translate formal policy commitments into resourced policy outcomes such as improved TVET institutions and training outcomes. There is evidence that coordinated policy approaches, supported by donors, can build momentum for improved policy and program outcomes. For example, the Government of Vanuatu has shown recent political determination to progress policy outcomes in the area of TVET, with the shift decision to shift responsibility for TVET to the new Ministry of Education and Training (MET), the establishment of the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority and the VQA Board and the introduction of a new Quality Management Systems within training providers (Annual Program Monitoring and Evaluation Report 2015). (Donor support through the DFAT-funded Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening Program has helped progress these reforms.) These developments will be covered in further detail below.

## Key developmental actors and developmental leaders

There are a broad range of stakeholders with an interest in youth employment issues in Vanuatu. The following section lists key actors. Subsequent sections will consider their positioning to exercise developmental leadership on youth employment issues.

### Vanuatu Government

Youth employment has been a stated priority for successive Vanuatu governments. Government policies with respect to youth employment are encapsulated in a wide number of policy documents. The Government's Priorities and Action Agenda (PAA) 2006-2015, which was developed in 2006, includes a broad commitment to improve macroeconomic management leading to increased employment and a specific commitment to support education and human resource development, which is of direct relevance to youth employment. The Government of Vanuatu is developing a National Skills Development Policy. A Vanuatu TVET Policy was finalized in 2011. It commits to develop a quality and demand-driven TVET system that is: 'demand-driven; is quality assured, providing pathways to national and international systems; is within a coordinated national framework; has contribution from a range of stakeholders; is flexible in its delivery; and which leads to productive, inclusive sustainable society and economy' (Government of Australia 2012: 3).

The Vanuatu National Youth Council is the peak youth body. It currently sits in the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) and has 8 sub-council organisations, representing each of the provinces and municipal centres. The NYC has a mandated role to represent the concerns and aspirations of young people in the development of relevant youth policies including a youth action plan. It is receiving strategic support from the ILO and other civil society organizations. There are moves to establish the NYC as a statutory authority, with the NYC aspiring to run core youth support programs.

There are a number of government agencies charged with implementing these policies. The MET and the MYS are jointly responsible for developing TVET policy in line with the government's policy priorities. The former is responsible for education policy generally. Its purview includes responsibility for Vanuatu's national scholarship program. The Ministry of Education and Training has responsibility for providing policy advice on TVET issues. The Vanuatu Qualifications Authority (VQA), formerly known as the Vanuatu National Training Council (VNTC), is an autonomous body with responsibility for leading implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and Quality Assurance Framework with post-secondary education and training providers.

The Department of Labour (DoL), in the Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for developing labour laws and employment policies. In June 2015, in response to the category 5 cyclone, the DoL established Employment Services Vanuatu (ESV) whose role is to provide employment services such as registration, career counselling, referrals and job placements to disenfranchised workers and unemployed youth.

### Vocational and training organisations

Vanuatu has a range of TVET training providers. The MET has established a number of provincial TVET Centres which aim to facilitate access to targeted skills training and business development services, consistent with provincial economic development priorities. The TVET Centres act as MET's service delivery and provincial coordination arm.

The MET also funds the Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT), the Vanuatu Agriculture College, Vanuatu Maritime College, Vanuatu College of Nursing Education, Vanuatu Police College and Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education. VIT provides a range of foundation certificates. There are a range of non-government training providers including 39 Rural Training Centres.

### Employers

The main employer body is the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), which has some 1,400 members (including all business license holders). VCCI does not have a direct skills development role, but has an interest in skills development issues and a role to lobby government and education institutions regarding labour market and education policy issues in Vanuatu. The VCCI includes representation on its board of major sectors, including tourism, construction and agriculture. The VCCI also represents employers on Vanuatu's Tripartite Labour Advisory Council (TLAC), a national high level body, legislated to support social dialogue between workers and government and to advise the Minister for Labour on labour and employment issues including youth employment.

VCCI has a training arm which provides business training support using the ILO's Start Your Business (SYB) programme to out of school youth. This programme is nationally accredited by the Vanuatu National Qualifications Authority (VNQA), with work place attachment and business development services provided by the VCCI members, as a pre-requisite to graduation, for young people.

### Civil Society

There are a broad range of civil society organisations active in areas of relevance to youth employment. Youth Challenge Vanuatu (YCV) is a youth led NGO established to respond to the challenges faced by young people in securing waged and self-employment. YCV targets out of school youths providing services such as entrepreneurship training, career counselling, drop-in-centre and web based job matching/referral services called "wok I kik".

The Vanuatu Council of Trade Unions (VCTU) youth wing works through the TLAC to protect the rights of young workers through the establishment of effective policies and laws to support the transition of young people from school to work.

Many youth organisations are active in livelihood and youth engagement programs. Wan Smolbag has supported a number of activities designed to help engage unemployed youth. Oxfam International provides support for local skills development including home economics, health, hospitality, small business management, agriculture, mechanics and carpentry. A range of civil society organisations also provide support for livelihoods development including microfinance and entrepreneurship capacity building (business planning and management etc.).

## Donors and technical agencies

There are a number of donors active in areas relevant to youth employment. Australia and New Zealand provide significant bilateral support for education and skills development. Australia's main support for skills development is delivered through its Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening Program Phase 3: 2013-2016, which aims to help the Government of Vanuatu strengthen national TVET policies, processes and institutions to support improved TVET outcomes. Australian support for the Australia Pacific Technical College (APTC) is also providing Australian certificate level training. New Zealand provides support for education (in a SWAp with Australia and UNICEF). Australia and New Zealand support general economic development in various ways, and also provide scholarship funding for overseas tertiary study.

One of the most significant development support programs provided by both Australia and New Zealand are their respective seasonal worker programs. New Zealand's Regional Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme saw some 3070 Ni-Vanuatu workers participate in 2013/14. Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) scheme saw some 212 participate in the same period.

The ILO, through the TLAC provides technical support to its Vanuatu Constituents. These include entrepreneurship and business development services with VCCI, rights of young workers with VCCTU and employment services with the DoL. ILO has also provided technical support to the VNYC and Youth Challenge Vanuatu on business training and career counselling.

## Prospects for Developmental Leadership and the Politics of Reform

As with Solomon Islands, prospects for significant reform in Vanuatu to improve youth employment outcomes is complicated because of the multi-fronted nature of the youth employment problem, the broad range of stakeholders with interests in the issue, but the absence of clear developmental leadership focal points to mobilise collective action in support of purposeful reform efforts.

In many respects youth employment is a non-contentious issue. Most groups in society recognize the urgent nature of the issue. The biggest challenge is mobilizing purposeful and coordinated action to ensure limited social resources are used most effectively to improve youth employment outcomes. This means the youth employment challenge oftentimes centres on translating general policy commitments into effective economic and social investments. Youth employment can become a contentious issue where reform proposals threaten to challenge local rent-seeking for some elite (most notably in regard to scholarship allocations which tend to favour elite families but do not represent an efficient use of scarce TVET resources).

Consistent with this, the politics of youth employment in Vanuatu centre primarily on issues of effective mobilization and institutional consolidation. Vanuatu is in the process of constructing and strengthening a set of institutions to support more collective action to improve education and skills development of most relevance to better youth employment outcomes. These institutions are already providing rules of the game which have the potential to help underpin effective collective action around the issue. However, the institutional framework is incomplete, needs refinement and oftentimes needs more dynamic leadership to cohere diverse institutions around a focused reform program.

In this sense the challenge of youth employment is primarily one of governance and the need for greater sector coordination. Vanuatu faces significant challenges in terms of building effective and strategic policies and institutions to support improved education to employment transitions for young people. These include ensuring greater coordination between the myriad of institutions that have a role to play (ministries, statutory organisations, and education and TVET institutions). There is a lack of strategic coordination in Vanuatu's policy approach to the issue, reflecting the multiple government stakeholders with interests in the area. Policy leadership in the youth employment space is not always clear. For example, the PMO and Ministry of Youth have competing roles in developing a national employment policy and a national youth policy. Strong political commitments to strengthen the demand-responsiveness of key labour market, education and TVET institutions does not always translate into coherent and implemented policy progress. Many interlocutors expressed frustration at delays in progressing policy initiatives and developing strategic policies to inform collective efforts in the space.

In addition to a fragmented and complex institutional and policy environment, the scale and breadth of youth employment as a policy issue also makes it difficult to engage with in a strategic manner. It is not always clear where developmental leaders would be best advised to concentrate efforts, or which policy reform would have the most significant impact. Seasonal worker schemes are providing tangible job opportunities for Vanuatu workers and supporting a reform process to refine and extend the benefits and equitable participation in such a scheme would constitute a compelling focus for engagement efforts.

Resourcing remains a challenge in terms of the capacity of policy makers to make substantive investments in youth employment issues. There is an unreality behind many of the formal policy commitments made by the Government of Vanuatu in terms of prioritizing limited funds and allocating them to areas of significant need. A recent Public Expenditure Review of Vanuatu's education sector found 'the GoV is trying to do too much relative to current and prospective funding availability' (Government of Vanuatu 2012: 3). Resourcing and technical gaps mean donors are important stakeholders in the youth employment space, providing supplementary technical and financial resourcing.

The capacity of donors to exercise a form of developmental leadership exists, reflected in existing partnership relationships informing aid programming, and in terms of the leverage provided by donors to encourage policy reform as part of seasonal worker scheme discussions.

It is difficult to see where the impetus for more coordinated political action to address youth employment will come from. Vanuatu has a more active suite of organisations and stakeholders working in the youth employment space compared to Solomon Islands, but the capacity of such groups to exercise strong developmental leadership remains complicated by the diffuse nature of youth employment issues and the atomized nature of the issue as experienced by young people, undermining the collective nature of the issue. While government is fragmented in its approach, it is not obvious where effective political pressure might come from to galvanise greater coordination across all actors.

There are many active youth organisations in Vanuatu, some more focused on employment issues than others. Most of these groups are more actively focused on youth entrepreneurialism as a more tangible part of the youth employment issue for them to grasp (the issue lends itself to more concrete activities such as entrepreneurialism training and issues around access to finance).

Similarly, employer representative bodies are interested in a range of youth employment issues including skills development. Vanuatu employers are better organized and VCCI provides a clear organizational focus point. VCCI has an active interest in TVET issues and has expressed a strong desire to work with the Government of Vanuatu to improve the demand responsiveness and quality of TVET outcomes. However, employers have expressed frustration at their limited capacity to mobilise national action in the area and continue to look for government to show stronger leadership on the issue. Donors are active stakeholders in the space and are incentivizing greater engagement on the issue, particularly by providing labour market opportunities to ni-Vanuatu through seasonal worker schemes.

Engaging with the politics of youth employment reform would ideally focus on strengthening the rules of the game so that institutions providing a more effective infrastructure encouraging better and strategic policy coordination. It would also involve strengthening the capacity of key stakeholder groups to engage with a complex reform issue more effectively, particularly by seeking to move a general interest in youth employment to more complex technical understandings of the issue in its various dimensions. Part of a support program for youth employment stakeholders would be helping build demand for better governance and policy coordination around the issue including to encourage stronger and more purposeful coordination and resourcing by government.

## Engagement Options

As with Solomon Islands, Vanuatu stakeholders have to grapple with various challenges to progress significant reforms in the youth employment space. Consultations with a broad range of stakeholders suggested that youth organisations are particularly active around individual-level youth engagement/participation issues, but there is a general policy engagement gap and stakeholder fragmentation around more structural engagement issues centred on skills development and the construction of a set of institutions to facilitate productive education to employment transitions for young people.

Options for sensible policy support for PLP include:

1. Modest support for youth representative organisations in support of job search and employability skills (i.e. CV development), noting that this is a crowded field.
2. Providing technical support to youth representative organisations to help them better understand the emerging formal labour market as a technical policy issue, to inform more creative forms of engagement with formal employment reform issues;
3. Drawing on PLP's convening power, provide support for a targeted policy workshop/conference on demand-driven skills frameworks. In doing so, PLP should deploy an inclusive approach designed to energise policy stakeholders and help overcome current fragmentation across policy stakeholders. Policy engagement would ideally focus on skills development as the priority issue – as opposed to national youth policy – and use the reform debates that arise from this issue to bring youth organisations more actively into the formal policy space.
4. Related to 3 is the need to support development of a more effective convening infrastructure that provides a clear institutional forum for stakeholders to meet to progress skills and education issues. A major organizational gap exists around a peak TVET sector organization that can encompass and act as a focal point for TVET, regional employment and youth employment issues. The onus is on the GoV to establish such a body, and many non-government stakeholders complained at the slow pace by which the Vanuatu Government has been moving to convene stakeholders. Activity 3 could be progressed in such a way to build momentum behind the policy issue leading to a more effective national forum. PLP could help facilitate such a process over a period of time, but could not lead in this space. Rather, it could help mobilise a team of significant stakeholders and provide them with resources to engage with the issue in a way that donors cannot.



# TONGA YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCAN

## Labour market context

Tonga has a large youth population, with over half (55.8 per cent) of the country's population (103,036) aged 24 years and younger (Government of Tonga and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2014: xiv). The 2011 census found the highest proportion of youth (15-24 years) in Tongatapu (19 per cent) and the lowest proportion in Ongo Niua (15 per cent) (ibid: 9). Around a third of Tonga's working age population (15-59 years) is aged between 15 and 24 years (Government of Tonga 2013: 12).

The limited number of employment opportunities in the domestic labour market is a major challenge for young people in Tonga. Demand for jobs is intensifying as more and more young people enter the working age population each year. In 2012 an estimated 2300 young people left secondary school at fifth form and above, in clear distinction to the estimated 180-300 job vacancies a year (ibid: 8). According to 2011 census data, Tonga's overall unemployment rate was 6.5 per cent if discouraged workers – that is those not looking for work – were included in the statistic (Government of Tonga and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2014: xv). The unemployment rate was 33.2 per cent if subsistence workers were included (ibid: xv). Measuring the unemployment rate is not straightforward, particularly due to the high degree of absorption of 'excess labour' in the subsistence sector (Bateman, Brown and Uera 2015: 29). The unemployment rate for people aged 15-24 is estimated to be much higher than the statistic for the overall working age population (ADB 2013).

As is the case elsewhere in the region, the 'bulge' in Tonga's youth population is a major factor contributing to the employment challenge in the country, and one that cannot be easily accommodated by Tonga's small economy. Growth in the economy is anticipated over the next two years, largely as a result of improved agricultural production and performance of the tourism industry, and with preparations for the 2019 South Pacific Games to be held in the country expected to ramp up (ADB 2015). Prospects for significant growth in the private sector, however, are unlikely in the short to medium term, with implications for economic growth and job creation (Government of Australia 2013). The economy also remains vulnerable to external and internal economic shocks and to the economic impacts of natural hazards (ADB 2013: 13). Notwithstanding a decline in cash remittances over the past seven years, remittances remain a key feature of the economy (ADB 2013: 9-10). So too, external aid continues to be a major feature of the economy.

The economy is dominated by the services sector – including hotels and restaurants, trade, transport and communication, public administration and services, health and social work, dwelling ownership – constituting around two thirds of GDP in FY2013 (Statistics Department and Ministry of Finance and National Planning figures in ADB 2013). The industrial sector – including the mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity and water supply and construction industries – is the second largest sector in the economy, followed by the primary sector, including agriculture, forestry and fishing (ibid). However, primary sector industries are a major source of employment in Tonga, with the sector accounting for 40 per cent of employment in FY2013 (ADB 2013: 7). The public service is also a relatively large employer.

Both the formal and informal economies are significant sources of. The 2011 census found that just under half (49.1 per cent) of Tongans aged 15 and over and in work are employed in the formal economy (Government of Tonga 2013: 49). A third (33.9 per cent) of those in this age bracket and in work do so in the informal economy, and 17 per cent are engaged in subsistence food production (ibid: 49). Approximately a third of jobs in the formal economy are classified as middle-skill level jobs – those requiring some formal education and training beyond secondary school, but generally not to the level of a tertiary qualification (ibid: 14). Despite a decrease in jobs at this level between 2006 and 2011, middle-skill jobs remain, and are anticipated to remain, a significant feature of employment in the formal economy (ibid: 17).

Participation in regional labour markets is an important pathway to employment for Tongan workers. The latest Australian census (2011) recorded 9,208 Tonga-born people residing in Australia, 21.4 per cent more than recorded in the 2006 census (Australian Government 2014b). 4990 of these people were in employment (ibid). Tongan workers are well represented in Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) constituting over 70 per cent of SWP participants (Government of Australia 2015). The most recent New Zealand census (2013) recorded 22,413 Tonga-born people living in New Zealand, with a much larger Tongan community living there (Tanielu, R. and Johnson, A. 2014: 15, Government of New Zealand 2013). The number of Tongan workers participating in New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Worker Program is also high (Government of New Zealand 2014). These figures highlight the importance of participation in regional labour markets as employment opportunities for Tongan workers, as well as the presence of viable pathways to regional labour market participation for Tongan workers.

There are a number of institutions in Tonga's education and training sector that are working to prepare young people for work, including schools, technical and vocational training providers and tertiary education providers. There are strengths and weaknesses regarding the ways in which these institutions are engaging with the youth employment challenge, and the extent to which they are generating a labour supply that responds to job opportunities in the domestic and regional labour market.

Primary and secondary school enrolments in Tonga are high, although there are issues in terms of the capacity of education institutions to equip students with skills that make them competitive in the workforce. The results of standardised testing highlight some weaknesses in some cognitive skill areas (Government of Tonga 2013). A survey of employers in Tonga in 2012 also highlighted some disconnect with the types of skills held by potential workers and the labour demand, with over half of the employers surveyed highlighting skills shortages (ibid: 46).

Employment outcomes for post-secondary qualification holders across industries in Tonga demonstrates varying degrees of effectiveness across Tonga's training and education system, particularly in regard to the matching of skills supply and demand. A tracer survey of the 2007-2010 graduates from Tonga post-secondary institutions conducted in 2011 showed, for example, that nursing and teaching graduates had high employment rates, whereas employment outcomes for graduates of certificate level training in information technology were much weaker (Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sport Tonga Graduate Tracer Survey 2011 results in Government of Tonga 2013). The survey highlighted the importance of close links between training institutions and employers, and aligning training opportunities to jobs available in the industry (ibid).

## Key actors relevant to youth employment issues – the organisational landscape

Many actors – government, private sector, non-government – are engaged with issues of youth employment in Tonga, indicating the complexity of the issue. As a result of their distinct mandates and interests, these organisations are positioned differently to engage with a reform agenda around youth employment issues, depending on the issues and associated politics involved. As such, their potential capacities to exercise developmental leadership in regard to youth employment, and the ways in which they might do so, is also varied. The following section considers key stakeholders of relevance to the issue of youth employment in Tonga. It does not provide an exhaustive list of stakeholders that are involved in issues of youth employment, but provides an indication of the organisational context in which developmental leadership with regard to youth employment should be considered in Tonga.

### Government of Tonga

Issues relevant to youth employment have been addressed in a number of recent Government of Tonga national strategies and policies. Tonga's two most recent national strategic development frameworks have acknowledged the significance of the youth employment challenge, albeit without engaging with the issue in depth. The Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF) 2011-2014 identified 'instilling discipline, basic life skills and good values in the youth, in particular addressing the needs of those who are unemployed' as a strategy for achieving its 'strong communities' outcome objective area (Government of Tonga 2012: 5). The TSDF 2011-2014 also prioritised building an 'appropriately skilled workforce to meet the available opportunities in Tonga and overseas, by delivering improved Technical and Vocational Education and Training' (ibid: 6). This objective is reflected in the Tonga Strategic Development Framework II: 2015-2025<sup>2</sup>, a product of the 'Akilisi Pohiva Government' (Government of Tonga 2015).

The Draft National TVET Policy Framework 2013-17 brings more substance to the strategies for developing an appropriately skilled workforce outlined in the TSDF 2011-2014, offering an approach to generating greater coordination and coherence to the TVET sector and to reorienting the system around industry demands (Government of Tonga 2012). The Tonga National Youth Strategy (TNYS) 2014-2019 also prioritises employment and income generating opportunities for young people, primarily through support for youth enterprise and youth participation in small-scale primary industry enterprises; improving the national youth unemployment registration system; and encouraging participation of youth in overseas short-term employment schemes (Government of Tonga 2014). At present, there is no current youth policy to give greater effect to the TNYS.

There are a number of ministries responsible for implementing policy commitments relevant to youth employment in Tonga and for youth issues more broadly. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is responsible for developing policy related to social and community development, and for many service delivery functions associated with social and community development. MIA has a relatively small Youth Division, which is charged with coordinating activities under the TNYS 2014-2019 and for developing national policy on youth issues. MIA's Employment Division is responsible for maintaining a register of job seekers, and facilitating placements in the private and public sector. The Division also manages Australia's and New Zealand's seasonal work schemes. It performs functions associated with preparing and sending Tongan workers to participate in these schemes. For example, it coordinates pre-departure training for selected workers and manages relationships with employers in Australia and New Zealand.

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<sup>2</sup> The Tonga Strategic Development Framework was endorsed by Cabinet in 2015.

The Ministry of Commerce and Labour (MCL) is responsible for promoting private sector business development, investment and employment opportunities in Tonga. It provides information to government on labour market issues, including to other government ministries, such as employment visa recommendations to the Immigration Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. MCL collects labour market information, recently having designed a labour market survey implemented by the Tupou Tertiary Institute. It is also responsible for policy development on employment relations. A core function of MCL, and one to which a significant amount of the Ministry's human resources are dedicated, is the registration of businesses operating in Tonga.

Tonga's TVET system is managed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MET), which was established in July 2012. Prior to this, various forms of TVET provision were the responsibility of the Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Education, Women's Affairs and Culture. MET is directly responsible for the administration of government TVET providers, including the Tonga Institute of High Education and the Tonga Institute of Science and Technology. The Ministry is also responsible for managing all other sectors in Tonga's education system (primary, secondary and tertiary).

While there are examples of cross-ministerial coordination on issues of relevance to youth employment in Tonga, a lack of systematic coordination between ministries on youth employment issues is a factor constraining development of a demand-driven skills system. Limited coordination between ministries, in part a result of frequent shifting of functions between ministries, also affects the effective implementation of existing policy commitments. Ministries are often forced to take on functions of which they have little experience managing and without sufficient resourcing, which affects their capacity to act on policy commitments, including those related to youth employment issues.

### Technical and Vocational Education Training Providers

The TVET landscape in Tonga is crowded, with a range of Government, faith-based and private-sector providers, including the Tupou Tertiary Institute (TTI), Queen Salote School of Nursing, Ahopanilolo Technical Institute, the Tonga Institute of Higher Education (TIHE), the Tonga Institute of Science and Technology (TIST), the Tonga Institute of Education, 'Unuaki 'o Royal Tonga Institute and the Tonga Business Education Centre. The University of the South Pacific (USP) is the main provider of higher education in Tonga. USP offers degree and post-graduate studies in arts, science, law and commerce by distance and continuing education and foundation studies on campus in Tonga.

There is a wide divergence in the entry requirements for TVET programs between different providers and programs, with implications for the sorts of pathways that are available to early school leavers. Some TVET providers in Tonga have established institutional links with overseas TVET institutions, particularly those in New Zealand, which offer pathways for trainees to upgrade qualifications outside of Tonga. Given Tonga's employment context in which employment in regional labour markets is an important pathway to employment for many workers, being able to achieve an internationally recognised qualification in Tonga is a priority for many young people. Although there is a number of programs that do provide internationally recognised qualifications, increasing the number of these programs is key to enhancing the young Tongans' employment options.

The large number of small TVET providers, limited control over the quality of training courses, and a disconnect between the supply of training courses and the skills required by employers are among the challenges that have affected the effectiveness of the TVET sector in Tonga. The establishment of the Tongan National Qualifications Board (TNQAB) and the introduction of the 2013 Draft National TVET Policy Framework have encouraged coherence and quality assurance in the sector. There are, though, challenges that continue to affect the sector and the extent to which it can play a key role in improving youth employment outcomes. In the absence of rigorous labour market information sharing systems, many training providers rely on their own research regarding skills in demand in Tonga and internationally, for the most part based on information shared from employers with whom they have long-term relationships, to inform their course offerings. As well as collectors of labour market information, training providers consulted during the study described the role they play as conduits of information between employers and their graduates regarding employment vacancies in Tonga and in the region. While some providers have their own systems for collecting information regarding skills in demand, and tailor their course offerings according to this information, training providers who offer similar courses without regard for industry demand often mitigate the effectiveness of their efforts.

### Donors

Supporting education and skills development is the key way in which external donors are engaging with the youth employment challenge in Tonga. The Australian Government is supporting the Tonga Interim Skills Development Facility (TISDF), which was established in May 2014, to address the immediate skills demand identified in the Government of Tonga's Labour Market Study 2013 and to demonstrate employment results. The TISDF is supporting an apprenticeship type training model in which training opportunities are connected to available work. A key challenge for the TISDF has been around managing expectations regarding the number of training positions that this model can support, due to having to rely on industry's capacity to train workers. The model does, however, present a clear move toward support for TVET provision centred upon industry-demand.



The Australian Government also provides support for TVET delivery in Tonga through the Australia-Pacific Technical College. Tongan students are supported to gain Australian qualifications in high-demand sectors through undergraduate, post-graduate and TVET courses at institutions in Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu.

The New Zealand Government also supports skills development in Tonga. The Tonga Business Enterprise Centre, a facility of the Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI), is funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) through the NZ Aid Programme. TBEC delivers a range of courses to the private sector, and does so in partnership with external business mentors and advisors and trainers. An independent evaluation of TBEC funded by the New Zealand Aid Programme found that TBEC's training, delivered at its present volume is expected to 'fulfil missing skills in private sector employees, and fits expectations about what is needed to initiate change and growth in the sector in order to achieve the desired outcomes' (Hardie-Boys 2014: 6). The New Zealand Government also supports in-country scholarships, which include TVET programs.

## Employers

Employers are obvious stakeholders in youth employment issues, having direct influence on youth employment outcomes as demanders of labour and indirectly as key economic stakeholders with interests in economic management. They also have clear interests in promoting an education and training sector that responds to their demands for skilled labour, for the availability and accessibility of adequately skilled labour is key to the performance of the businesses and organisations.

Some employers consulted during this research stated their employment preference for young workers, for various reasons including their familiarity with new technologies, demonstrated aptitude for picking up skills quickly and using those skills innovatively. Many employers have strong relationships with particular TVET providers and a tendency to provide employment opportunities to graduates from those providers, based upon their preference for the skills generally held by graduates of particular courses.

There is demand from employers, including members of the Tongan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI), for revised and updated curriculum in particular programs to ensure that graduates are appropriately skilled to meet employment opportunities. Some employers in the IT sector, for example, said that they are required to recruit workers with qualifications from overseas training institutions, and to train their employees on the job, due to a shortfall in the skills developed in training courses delivered in the country. Some employers had provided guidance to Tonga-based training providers and MET on the skills that they require, with a view to encouraging better employment outcomes for the graduates of some programs, but felt that curriculum development systems are not flexible enough to respond to such feedback.

Members of the TCCI are involved in the shaping training programs delivered by TBEC for their employees. Members consulted during this research were interested in engaging with TVET strategic planning more broadly and playing a constructive role in the development of TVET programs. They noted mutual benefits for themselves and trainees in greater industry engagement in TVET planning. Despite recognising this, it was not apparent that industries had acted collectively to push for greater representation in the sector.

## Non-government organisations

There are a number of non-government organisations in Tonga engaging directly with the issue of youth employment, albeit with different approaches. The Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC), for example, has a strong focus on directly supporting income-generating activities for young people. The TNYC has dedicated a great deal of attention to expanding production-based income generating activities, focusing on virgin coconut oil largely for export. TNYC has focused on creating skills development opportunities for early school leavers, having identified this as an area it perceives to be under-addressed in government approaches to skills development for young people.

The TNYC has also engaged with government on a broader range of issues relevant to youth. For example, it has worked with the MET to advocate for responses to school violence in Tonga and with the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Tourism regarding proposed income-generating projects. TNYC's engagement with government on the issue of youth employment has focused largely on garnering support for specific projects rather than pushing for a broad-fronted policy reform on youth employment.

The Tonga Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (TYEE) organisation is a not-for-profit youth employment and entrepreneurship support service organisation, established in April 2015, which focuses on supporting young people's transition to work. TYEE collects and provides information on employment opportunities for young people, supports the development of a range of job-seeking skills, including resume writing and job interview conduct, provides mentorship to those who secure work, and advice to youth entrepreneurs. Since its establishment, TYEE has encountered significant demand from young people for their services, and has also received positive feedback from employers, for the most part from the private sector, who have taken on young people supported by TYEE.

Other non-government organisations in Tonga are engaging with youth employment issues more indirectly, for example through a focus on youth empowerment, as a means of preventing young people from becoming socially isolated. ICON Creative Tonga runs a range of creative arts workshops that are intended to help young people to develop their creative arts skills and to support them to secure work in the creative arts. The organisation is particularly focused on providing a space for youth at risk to build new skills and networks. UNDP's Tonga Governance Strengthening Programme (TGSP) which ended in 2015, supported collective action between various youth groups in Tonga regarding particular issues (violence, unemployment and corruption). TGSP is looking to identify ways to support engagement between youth groups and representatives from formal democratic institutions around issues, such as anti-corruption.

In general, youth organisations in Tonga are cognisant of the need to engage with government to advance their agendas. Despite this awareness, they have faced challenges in meaningfully engaging with government around substantive policy issues. While there are consultation periods built into the development of frameworks and policies that address issues relevant to youth, youth organisations have struggled to influence policy development through these processes. Consequently, some youth organisations have chosen to focus their attention on what they believe to be more practical solutions to the youth employment challenge, rather than engaging with policy debates.

## Prospects for Developmental Leadership and the Politics of Reform

Given the multifaceted nature of the youth employment challenge in Tonga, assessing where potential development fault-lines lay in relation to youth employment issues is complex. Given the interconnectedness and complexity of a range of relevant issues, including macroeconomic policy and employment generation, labour market transitions and information collection, barriers and opportunities for migration, and skills development, the politics of reform associated with youth employment are complex and mean that the politics of youth employment must be considered in the context of broader economic and employment issues.

There are many constraints to the exercise of developmental leadership around the youth employment challenge. Not least, the complexity of macroeconomic policy issues that contribute to the challenge. So too, the dispersed responsibility for functions related to youth employment across government agencies presents challenges for coordination and leadership on youth employment. The complex TVET provider landscape, in which different providers follow different approaches to assessing labour-market demand and to building employment pathways with employers and overseas training institutions, also complicates coordinated TVET provision. Employers, despite having obvious interests in having access to a pool of skilled labour, also face challenges in engaging with the training and education system management. Many youth organisations are working to address the youth employment challenges in various ways, although, on the whole, have not successfully engaged with policy development processes through policy focused advocacy. That said, these challenges also highlight areas in which developmental leadership could have a positive development outcome in relation to the youth employment challenge.

A factor of the politics of youth employment in Tonga is associated with the governance of the skills development system. A stronger strategic and more coordinated approach to skills development centred upon industry demand is one factor that could promote improved youth employment outcomes. Developing and managing a skills development and training system that responds to domestic and regional labour market demands, with clear connections between labour-market information collection systems, relevant and high-quality training programs, and social programs that seek to connect skilled youth with employment opportunities requires, among other factors, close collaboration between a range of government ministries, appropriate resourcing allocations, and the systematic engagement of non-government actors.

Although functions directly related to youth employment are being performed across the Tongan government, albeit with areas for improvement, there lacks an institutional infrastructure in which ministries coordinate, share information, and decide who is best placed to take leadership on reforms that need to be made or processes that need to be strengthened in order to enhance the coherence and responsiveness of the skills development system. An institutional framework relevant to youth employment is not only significant to government ministries, but given the policy development and implementation functions that lie at the core of the challenges, they are critical stakeholders in such an infrastructure and for providing formal systems through which relevant stakeholders, including employers and youth groups, can engage.

Resourcing is an obvious challenge constraining policy-makers capacity to engage with policy issues that are critical to youth employment. Ministries responsible for developing key policies that relate to youth employment are also charged with implementing and coordinating the implementation of youth and education programs that are human resource intensive. Capacity issues constrain ministries' capacities to implement existing policy commitments, and to develop policy relevant to youth to give substance to the Government's broad development framework.

Donors have a role to play in filling resource gaps and providing technical expertise to support the development of a more industry-centred skills development system. Whilst it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the Interim Skills Development Facility, the Facility provides an operational model for more closely connecting training opportunities and employment outcomes that may provide useful lessons for the shaping of the system in the future.

Industry also has a clear role to play in shaping a responsive TVET system, and creating opportunities for young people to develop their skills in a work environment. While industry is yet to have taken a concerted role in pushing for the establishment of systems through which they can meaningfully contribute to the development of TVET in Tonga, it is conceivable that as technology develops, and the requirements for new employees with knowledge of such technologies increases so will employers demands of the training system.

In light of the established 'first mover advantage' in which migrants from Pacific island countries have been found to serve as effective 'agents of mobility' connecting prospective migrants in their countries of origin to employment opportunities in their countries of residence, diaspora communities have a role to play in extending regional labour market participation of young Tongan workers. The Australian Government's recent decision to uncap the number of visas available under the SWP provides an obvious pathway for more Tongan workers to seek seasonal work in Australia. The Tongan diaspora community may be an important and effective way of raising young Tongans awareness about the opportunity.

Considering the importance of an institutional infrastructure that encourages coordination, information sharing, and strategic policy development for the effective governance of a skills development system that promotes employment outcomes, supporting youth employment stakeholders to advocate for the development of such an infrastructure would be a potentially significant means of engaging with the politics of youth employment. Given the reach of some youth organisations in Tonga, and their engagement with youth who are often outside the bounds of other bodies that might represent their interests (education institutions and employers), youth organisations also have a critical representational role to play in generating public debate about the importance of a strategic approach to skills development.

## Engagement Options

As is established by the above analysis, those with a stake in progressing positive policy reforms in relation to youth employment are engaging in a crowded field. The following are offered as possible options for PLP to support positive contributions to a reform agenda on youth employment options in Tonga:

1. Providing modest support for organisations that are involved with providing opportunities for youth to transition from education to work. There are a few youth organisations, such as the Tonga National Youth Congress, and Tonga Youth Employment and Enterprise, focussed on providing young people with skills that enable their transition to income generation. Although the functions of these organisations is not likely to engage with structural issues associated with the youth employment challenge in Tonga, they do offer valuable, and in demand, support for young people seeking out income generating and employment opportunities.
2. Providing modest support for youth groups acting collectively to engage with policy debates, particularly regarding employment issues. There are indications that a network for youth organisations, supported by UNDP's Tonga Governance Strengthening Programme (TGSP), is starting to engage with formal political processes around specific issues, such as anti-corruption. Such a network may provide a valuable platform for collective action of youth employment issues to engage with formal political processes with greater effect than youth organisations' individual actions. PLP may be positioned to provide support members of the network with advice regarding strategies for policy engagement.
3. Supporting collective action through the development of an institutional infrastructure. Using PLP's convening power, working in close collaboration with DFAT and other donors engaging with youth employment issues, and drawing on its relationship with the Tongan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, PLP might convene a discussion between industry representatives, TVET providers, and relevant government stakeholders on increasing industry engagement in TVET strategic management.

The Draft National TVET Policy Framework 2013-17 sets out a plan for bringing greater coordination and coherence to the TVET sector in Tonga and for reorienting the system around industry demands. Within this context, PLP could convene a discussion with relevant policy stakeholders, industry representatives and TVET providers to identify specific ways in which industry can be better represented in TVET planning in Tonga. Members of TCCI are interested in being engaged in TVET planning processes, and thus the Chamber is an important stakeholder for PLP on this issue. This forum could also be used to raise discussion on current labour market information collection systems in Tonga, and how the information they collect is fed into TVET program development, how such systems might be strengthened, and how they can be used as a tool to guide TVET planning.

# SAMOA YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCAN

## Labour market context

Samoa has a large youth population, with the majority (57 per cent) of the population (187,820) under the age of 24 (Government of Samoa 2011: 20). Around 20 per cent of the population lives in Apia, where economic activity is greatest (ibid: vi). Labour force participation in Samoa generally is low, with a participation rate of 32.2 per cent (ILO 2014: 1). Of those in work, the large majority (68.3 per cent) are in informal employment (ibid). Securing employment is a major challenge for many young Samoans. The unemployment rate for those aged 15-29 is 16.4 per cent nearly twice that of the overall unemployment rate (8.7 per cent) (ibid). The rate is higher if those able to work, but not actively looking for work, are included. Unemployment statistics also show the gendered nature of youth employment, with 20.2 per cent of young Samoan women unemployed compared with 10.4 per cent of young Samoan men (ibid). Demand for white-collar jobs is particularly high. Many school-leavers seek employment in white-collar professional jobs where there are limited job vacancies. The majority of those employed in these jobs have tertiary-level qualifications, placing significant pressure on those seeking professional jobs to gain tertiary qualifications (Maglen, Brown and Lene 2015: 31).

Despite recent economic growth, the size and dynamics of Samoa's economy present a range of constraints to job creation. The economy is characterised by an imbalance in trade – much higher imports than exports – that presents a major constraint to economic growth (Government of Samoa 2014: 3). Samoa is highly dependent on remittances – remittances accounted for approximately 26 per cent of GDP in FY2013 (ILO 2014). External development assistance is also a significant component of the economy. Samoa's economy is susceptible to external economic shocks, and also to the effects of natural disasters, with the 2012 Cyclone Evan having a significant negative impact on economic performance (ibid: 1). The majority of the country's exports come from the agriculture sector, which employs a significant proportion of the population (Maglen, Brown and Lene 2015: 27). Other major industries in Samoa include construction services, manufacturing, and commerce and financial services, and tourism.

Migration to New Zealand, American Samoa and Australia is a well-established pathway to employment for Samoans. Around 130,000 Samoans are thought to have emigrated from the country, with most living in New Zealand, American Samoa and Australia (ILO 2014: 3). Young people and those with higher levels of education are the most likely to migrate (ibid).

Matching skills development with skills in demand is a key policy challenge in Samoa. Despite high unemployment rates, private sector employers report significant skill shortages in the working age population. In 2010 almost half (44.7 per cent) of private sector employers experienced skill shortages (ibid). Samoa's education and training system faces significant challenges in equipping young people with skills to obtain work. There are relatively low rates (around 50 per cent) of secondary school completion in Samoa, with particularly high dropout rates for boys (Government of Australia 2015). The Samoan census data shows high literacy rates (97 per cent), however census-recorded literacy rates are not supported by representative functional literacy assessment which may find lower rates of functional literacy beyond self-reporting. A study into the financing of TVET in Samoa found that 'lacking literacy and numeracy skills remain constraints to participation in TVET in Samoa, particularly as the system has high academic entry requirements for post-secondary studies and few alternative or vocational pathways available' (Maglen, Brown and Lene 2015: 24).

## Key stakeholders of relevance to youth employment Samoa

As is the case in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga, a number of actors –government, private sector, non-government – are engaged with issues of youth employment in Samoa. The following section considers key stakeholders of relevance to the issue of youth employment in the country. It does not provide an exhaustive list of stakeholders that are involved in issues of youth employment, but provides an indication of the organisational context in which developmental leadership with regard to youth employment should be considered.

### Government of Samoa

Labour market information has been major challenge for the Samoan Government in crafting and implementing high impact programs. In 2012, the ILO provided technical assistance in for the Samoa School-to-Work transition survey and Labour Force Surveying, providing relevant and timely data for evidenced based national policies and plans.

In March 2015 the Samoan Government launched the Samoa National Action Plan on Youth Employment (SNAPoYE) project, an initiative of the ILO, which sets out a strategy for addressing the youth employment challenge in the country for the first time. Notwithstanding its prioritisation of employment creation generally, the Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2012-2016 does not focus on youth employment (Government of Samoa 2012).

The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MoWCSD) recognised the limited focus on youth employment issues in national policy debate and policy development regarding employment issues in 2014, following a stocktake of all relevant policies, programs, strategies and frameworks of relevance to youth employment. It found that '(i)n terms of employment in general: no specific focus/emphasis on youth employment reflected in policies, legislations, strategies and plans' (Government of Samoa 2014b: 25).

The SNAPoYE, a 12 month project, to be implemented by MoWCSD, with the leadership of the ILO and support from a range of UN organisations including, UNDP, FAO, UNESCO, and UNV, provides for the development of a plan to identify human and financial resource requirements in relation to youth employment, an institutional framework to coordinate, monitor and report on the delivery of the plan and support for the creation of sustainable jobs for young people. Significantly, it provides a framework for collective action between stakeholders involved in youth employment. MoWCSD, and specifically its Youth Division, is responsible for a range of youth issues. Its mandate is broad and includes providing policy advice on a range of community and social development issues, including youth and child development, and delivering and monitoring a number of community and social development programs.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL) and the Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) oversee components of TVET, but no ministry is responsible for management of the system as a whole. MCIL administers employment services and the apprenticeships program. MCIL is responsible for maintaining a register of job seekers, identifying employment opportunities for those on the register, and providing basic job seeker training. The apprenticeship program combines on-the-job training and study, which is undertaken through the National University of Samoa (NUS). Completion of Year 11 is a requirement for entry to the scheme as is secure employment in a trade relevant to the course of study.

Established in 2006, the Samoan Qualifications Authority (SQA) provides quality assurance for the post-school education and training sector, of which TVET is a part. SQA also oversees the higher education sector and has responsibility for the development of the Samoa Qualifications Framework. The SQA registers providers across the post-secondary education sector, including TVET. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture administers Samoa's education system, though has no direct mandate for managing TVET.

### Technical and Vocational Education and Training Providers

There are a number of post-secondary education and training providers, including public, private, regional and other structured training providers, in Samoa. All publicly provided TVET is delivered through the NUS, following a merger of the Samoa Polytechnic and NUS in 2006 and the formation of the Institute of Technology (IoT) within NUS. Responding to the need for TVET pathways for those with low literacy, the National University of Samoa (NUS) offers a functional literacy and numeracy for basic trades course targeted at those whose experience of basic education may or may not have provided adequate functional literacy and numeracy.

There are a number of private TVET providers, including Don Bosco Technical Centre, Laumua o Punaoa Technical Centre and Uesiliana Technical and Vocational Centre, which are managed by the Catholic and Methodist Churches, and a business-run TVET provider. APTC also serves as a regional TVET provider in Samoa. In addition to these formal TVET providers, a number of organisations offer community-based training programs. These non-public training providers receive minimal financial support from government (Maglen, Brown and Lene 2015).

There is a range of issues associated with the TVET sector in Samoa that influence its positioning to improve employment outcomes of young people. The absence of a strong strategic approach to TVET constrains the development of a more demand-driven skills development system. Despite the absence of a coordinated approach, there is little duplication in the areas of TVET delivered by the different providers (ibid 2015). Despite a formal role for industry participation in TVET quality assurance through the SQA accreditation process, for example the Samoan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) having a seat on the SQA Board, employers and training providers suggested potential value in increased industry engagement in TVET planning to promote its effectiveness and relevance.

Limited pathways between training providers provide challenges for young people wanting to upgrade their qualifications. Enrolment eligibility requirements vary between providers, with only a few private providers offering training to those who have not completed secondary school. There is a lack of formal pathways between the level 1 and 2 qualifications offered by these providers and higher qualifications offered by other training institutions, which restricts early school-leavers capacity to gain high-level qualifications through the TVET system (Maglen, Brown and Lene 2015).

As more and more young people in Samoa enter the working age population each year, demand for jobs will intensify, while employers demands for skilled labour is also likely to increase as the economy develops. Developing a TVET system that responds to both sides of demand is critical to engaging with the youth employment challenge in Samoa. While there are a range of TVET providers who are assisting young people to gain skills and assist their transition from secondary school to work, there are clear areas in which the TVET system could be better leveraged to build a skilled labour force to meet skills demand and support economic development.



## Employers

Employers are obvious and important stakeholders in youth employment issues, with direct influence upon youth employment outcomes as demanders of labour and indirectly as key economic stakeholders with interests in economic management. They also have clear interests in promoting an education and training sector that responds to their demands for skilled labour, for the availability and accessibility of adequately skilled labour is key to the performance of the businesses and organisations.

The size of private sector activity and foreign investment in Samoa provides a primary constraint on the level of employer activity, and the capacity of employers to organize and represent their interests in guiding labour market supply. Given the importance of overseas labour market opportunities, demand signals and pathways from overseas employers is important to improve youth employment prospects for Samoans.

Some employers consulted during this research stated their employment preference for young workers. Based upon a preference for the sorts of skills they teach and perceived consistency in training outcomes, some employers have built strong relationships with particular TVET providers. For example, an employer in the manufacturing industry most often seeks graduates from a particular training provider to fill job vacancies due to a preference for the skills taught in programs offered by that provider.

SCCI, comprised of 334 members from the private sector, is formally engaged in TVET quality assurance processes. It is represented on the SQA Board, the apprenticeships program board, and on other government advisory boards with reference to employment issues. Notwithstanding the importance of these representational roles, employers consulted in the course of this research consider that there is far greater scope for industry engagement in TVET in Samoa both at the strategic management level and at the operational level – i.e. curriculum development.

Employers have established feedback loops through which they provide information on curriculum relevance to TVET providers, based on relationships with management and trainers. Some employers considered this to be a more effective way of shaping curriculum than engaging with SQA processes, particularly to signal specific skills requirements that they would like to see addressed through particular training courses – for example in mechanical courses. Generally, employers expressed interest in playing a more significant role in the development of TVET programs in Samoa. Beyond input into TVET, the SCCI also engages with youth employment through the maintenance of a register of job-seekers whose skills it seeks to match to job vacancies advertised by its members. This system is perceived by some members to be a more effective means of identifying appropriately skilled labour than other employment registers.

## Non-government organisations and youth organisations

There are a number of non-government organisations in Samoa engaging directly with different aspects of the youth employment challenge and with different approaches. The Samoa National Youth Council (SNYC) is working actively across a number of youth employment issues, for example advocating of youth employment issues in the policy context and supporting the development of job-search skills. With 205 (at least on paper) village representatives, SNYC engages with youth across the country. SNYC is working in partnership with the ILO and the Samoan Bureau of Statistics, and with PLP's support, to conduct an employment survey collecting data on formal and informal employment of youth and their involvement in economic activity. The survey is intended to generate information on geographic pockets of unemployment and also information about young people's job-searching experiences. The data is anticipated to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the youth employment challenge in the country.

SNYC is also working with MoWCSD and MCIL to implement and manage an e-platform for youth employment services, with support from a range of UN donor organisations. The e-platform, a component of the One-UN (Samoa) Youth Employment Program (1UN-YEP), is anticipated to provide youth with information on job opportunities and employment services in order to facilitate their successful entry to the labour market. Although the e-platform is yet to be implemented, the project provides an interesting example of cooperation between a youth organisation, government, donors and technical agencies.

## Donors and Technical Agencies

The Australian Government is providing support for skills development in Samoa through a number of initiatives. Recent investments in the sector reflect a shifting in the focus of Australian support toward building a more demand-driven TVET system. The Education Sector Support Program 2015-2018, a collaboration between the Australian and New Zealand Governments, is intended to develop clearer pathways between secondary education and tertiary or technical vocational education. The New Zealand Government, through NZAID, is currently running a pilot under the program, which will inform future programming.

The Australian Government also provides support for TVET delivery in Samoa through APTC. Samoan students are supported to gain Australian qualifications in high-demand sectors through undergraduate, post-graduate and TVET courses at institutions in Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu. It is also working with the SQA to develop the National Qualifications Framework with the overall objective being a quality-assured TVET system that supports the competitiveness of graduates in the domestic labour market and regional labour markets.

There are a number of multilateral organisations who are working to address youth employment in Samoa. The 2.5 year 1UN-YEP began in June 2015 following a request from the Samoan Government for to support its efforts to address youth employment in the country. The objective of 1UN-YEP, which involves a program of coordinated activities, is to assist youth 'to develop the knowledge and skills needed to enter the labour market, and to provide them with the additional supporting services needed to secure decent work opportunities in either waged employment or in small business development' (Samoa 'One United Nations' Youth Employment Program 2015). 1UN-YEP is significant in that it provides a program of activities around which 5 UN agencies – UNDP, ILO, FAO, UNESCO and UNV – will coordinate to support, in an effort to maximise the effectiveness of their engagement to address youth employment in Samoa.

## Prospects for Developmental Leadership and the Politics of Reform

The youth employment challenge in Samoa is complex, not least because of the scale of the issue, but also due to the macroeconomic policy issues involved and the interconnectedness of labour-supply and labour-demand issues. Assessing where potential development fault-lines with respect to youth employment might lie must be done in the context of the broad politics of youth employment.

There are substantial policy challenges for the Samoan government, employers, training providers, civil society, donors and regional partners in addressing the youth employment challenge in Samoa. The introduction of measures to support economic growth and increased employment opportunities, for example those that support the transition of Samoa's substantial subsistence-based agricultural production to more market-oriented production in the domestic economy, is a fundamental policy priority for Samoa and one with direct relevance to the youth employment challenge (ILO 2014). Providing support for effective entrepreneurship incubators that promote job creation within Samoa, the reduction in external barriers to migration that provide greater access to employment opportunities outside Samoa, and the creation of pathways to entry into labour markets outside of Samoa that respond to the particular needs of young Samoan workers are also key policy challenges with clear implications for the improvement of youth employment outcomes in Samoa. So too, the development and maintenance of an education and training system that supports young people to gain the skills that will help them to take up employment opportunities in the domestic labour market and regional labour markets is a policy priority.

The Samoan Government's endorsement of the SNAPoYE in 2015 signalled a commitment to engage with the youth employment challenge in a more coordinated way, with support from technical agencies and donors. The extent to which the SNAPoYE will be an impetus for action on policy reform agendas that have a significant impact on youth employment is not clear, though the plan does provide a new platform for policy debate on issues of youth employment.

Despite broad-based recognition of the scale of youth unemployment in Samoa, there has been relatively little policy debate generated about the issue or about policy options for engaging with youth employment issues at the national level. In this context, the role that the SNYC is positioning itself to play in engaging in policy discussion with policy stakeholders about youth employment issues is noteworthy. Supported by a number of donors, SNYC's recognition of the value in deepening its understanding of youth employment issues through research, and how that knowledge positions it to engage more equally in discussions with policy stakeholders, suggests that it is well placed to progress a reform agenda on issues of youth employment. A key challenge for SNYC in pursuing policy discussions about youth employment will be engaging with ministries and other government bodies that do not have a direct remit for youth issues broadly, but have responsibility for developing and implementing policies and programs of direct relevance to youth employment.

Actors across Samoa recognise the scale of the youth employment challenge in the country, and the associated political, economic and social implications of a significant proportion of young people being out of work and/or training. This recognition, however, has not been matched with concerted political action to engage with youth unemployment, particularly through a clear approach to skills development. While there are government bodies overseeing parts of the post-secondary education and training system, there is a lack of leadership over the whole skills development system. This will remain a significant factor with skills gaps likely to increase as Samoa's main industries grow. The challenges and politics of youth employment are based, in large part, around issues of institutional consolidation and sector leadership.

The provision of good-quality and accessible training that enables young Samoan workers to gain recognised qualifications in Samoa is beneficial for trainees and potential employers. The lack of pathways between training institutions that, if present, would allow trainees to upgrade their qualifications in Samoa is a key weakness of the system as it currently operates. Employers and employer representative bodies are interested in a range of youth employment issues including skills development and may be possible advocates for improvements to the responsiveness of the system.

## Engagement Options

For PLP, engaging with the politics of youth employment in Samoa reform would ideally focus on supporting key stakeholder group to engage with the complex reform issues through coordinated approaches and supporting a more coherent institutional response to skills development that is matched with employee demands.

Options for sensible support from PLP around youth employment issues include:

1. Modest support for representative organisations providing job search skills for young people and access to information about job vacancies in both the domestic labour market and regional labour market.
2. Modest support to representative youth organisations, such as SNYC, to continue gathering information that supports a deeper understanding of the dynamics of youth employment in Samoa, and technical understanding of the complexity of youth employment issues from a policy perspective, to inform their engagement with policy stakeholders regarding formal employment reform issues that are of most relevance to young people.
3. Supporting collective action. Using PLP's convening power, working in close collaboration with DFAT and other donors engaging with youth employment issues, and drawing on its relationship with the SCCI, PLP might convene discussions between industry representatives, the SQA, and other relevant stakeholders on ways in which training and education can best support young people to be competitive for existing jobs in the domestic and regional labour markets.
4. The SNAPoYE represents an effort by the Government of Samoa and donors to bring greater coordination to engagement on youth employment issues in Samoa. Given PLP's unique mandate, as well as the number of donor programs engaging with issues of youth employment in Samoa, the SNAPoYE may provide a valuable basis from which PLP can identify entry points for engaging with youth employment issues that adds value to efforts to engage with youth employment and complement other donor efforts in this area.



## YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCAN – PACIFIC REGION

This section does not provide an in-depth analysis of the state of the Pacific labour market and the youth employment challenge. This is because such issues have been dealt with in depth at the national level in previous sections. Rather, this section focuses on how youth employment issues are being approached at the regional level, and options for PLP to support regional engagement efforts that complement country-level initiatives.

### Regional policy context

With youth (broadly defined as those between 15-30 years of age) making up over a quarter of the Pacific population (UNICEF and SPC 2011: 7), interest in youth employment issues at the Pacific regional level stems largely from the scale of the youth employment challenge, including the regional youth bulge, and the recognised economic, social and political significance of this demography for the region. National governments and regional organisations have developed a raft of initiatives to support youth, most of which have a key focus on employment and education.

The most significant regional level commitment on youth employment is the Forum Leaders 2011 Communiqué, which reflects the commitment of Pacific leaders to address issues affecting youth, including employment, through the mainstreaming of youth issues at both national and regional levels (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2011). The 2011 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Communiqué provided a mandate for youth stakeholders and development agencies to engage with youth issues and has given rise to a series of policy initiatives to improve coordination on youth issues. This includes PYDF, which identifies four priority issue areas - employment and training, health, governance and participation, environment. The PYDF outlines a structure for regional coordination and governance structures that link national governments and youth stakeholders to support coordinated responses to youth issues (SPC 2013b).

As mentioned in the opening section of this report, the issue of youth employment has been addressed at a number of other regional meetings, including the SPC 2013 Meeting of Pacific Ministers of Youth and Sport at which Ministers endorsed the draft PYDF and called for action on youth employment (SPC 2013a). Another call for action on youth employment was made at the 2014 Small Island Development States Conference, with leaders calling on member states to promote the creation of more decent employment opportunities for youth (United Nations 2014). The Pacific Youth Strategy 2010 (SPC 2006), which establishes a regional framework for youth development in the Pacific region, arose from a Conference of the Pacific Community meeting at Koror, Palau in 2005 which adopted the 'Koror Statement on Youth and Empowerment for a Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Future'. This was subsequently reflected in commitments of Pacific Youth Ministers in late 2005 to develop a regional youth strategy. The strategy includes commitments to strengthen access to integrated education, support sustainable livelihoods and build the institutional capacity of Pacific governments to engage with youth issues.

Aside from these high-level commitments made at regional meetings, the policy context has also been framed by a number of significant reports on youth employment which have sought to underscore the importance of youth as a cross-cutting development issue in the region. State of Pacific Youth Report 2011: Opportunities and Obstacles (UNICEF and SPC 2011) noted the enduring nature of youth challenges in the region (since the publication of the first State of Pacific Youth Report in 2005).

A key focus of various reports is to advocate for the mainstreaming youth issues, making them cross-cutting considerations across a range of development initiatives. They emphasise the importance of youth employment as a central part of any substantive regional response to youth issues. In addition to youth-oriented policy activities, there are a range of broader initiatives that are of relevance to youth employment. A key issue is that of regional economic integration and long-term efforts to strengthen regional economic governance in support of increased investment and employment.

### External Pathways and Barriers: Development Partners and Labour Receiving Countries

Training and employment opportunities and pathways available for Pacific youth will continue to be guided by the policies and actions of external partners. The reality of Pacific Island Country economic and labour market context means that a substantial proportion of job opportunities for young people will be found overseas, either in countries that have traditionally hosted Pacific migrant workers, or in new destinations. Countries with 'first mover advantages' and demonstrated capacity in advocating for and coordinating the sending of labour are likely to continue to benefit more from such labour migration opportunities. Without reform or targeted interventions, countries that have less sending capacity or with weaker diaspora networks such as Solomon Islands and Kiribati are likely to continue to benefit less. Barriers persist: access to labour mobility benefits is significantly driven by the migration barriers established by labour receiving countries. While government and society in Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji in particular have demonstrated leadership and coordination in sending labour and benefiting from remittances over successive decades, labour sending schemes are at times significantly over-subscribed relative to the opportunities available. Of the number of applications accepted for the Samoan Quota and Pacific Access Category for migration to New Zealand, less than a tenth are successfully drawn in a ballot. Even then, Samoans and Tongans are the 'lucky ones' able to access migration pathways to New Zealand and through to Australia. As a result, Samoan-born migrants outnumber Solomon Islands migrants to Australia by around 10 to 1 (Curtain, 2013).

The Australia Pacific Technical College (APTC) is recognised as a major investment by the Australian Government in providing Australian-recognized vocational skills for Pacific Island employees. A flagship program, the Australian Government invested AUD177 million in APTC over two phases from 2007 to 2015. While providing Pacific Islanders with recognized Australian qualifications was intended as a pathway to labour mobility, the design of the program and poor coordination with growing migration barriers result in very low rates of labour mobility for graduates. Evaluation of APTC in 2014 looked at its approach to labour mobility in detail and provided recommendations for DFAT to develop a coordinated approach to labour mobility in the Pacific in consultation with Australian immigration authorities. DFAT's management response to the APTC evaluation stated:

*"The labour mobility analysis in the report is very comprehensive and raises some good issues. With relatively few graduates migrating outside of the Pacific (2.9%) for many reasons including immigration regulations in receiving countries, the question of how to improve labour mobility opportunities from APTC will be considered by DFAT in scoping and design work for the next phase of the program. During the contract extension phase of APTC Stage 2 (July 2015 to June 2018), DFAT, in close consultation with Whole of Government partners, will seek to formalise arrangements to open up opportunities for student and graduate study and work placements in Australia" Government of Australia 2015: 3).*

The public policy agenda for expanding Pacific youth employment is therefore not just a domestic one, but one for coordinated policies and pathways supported by external partners.

## Key developmental actors and developmental leaders

There are a range of regional-level stakeholders with interests in youth employment issues. The principal youth representative body is the Pacific Youth Council (PYC). PYC is a regional non-government youth organisation that works closely with national youth councils to support youth advocacy on key policy issues. The PYC played a major role in coordinating advocacy efforts of national youth councils to have youth employment placed on the Forum Leaders agenda in 2011.

At the regional organisation level, SPC is the principal organisation with a mandate to lead on youth issues, including having responsibility for supporting national governments to progress the Pacific Youth Strategy 2010 and to play a key coordination role in the PYDF. Other key regional technical and development partners include the ILO, UNICEF and UNDP. In its role in progressing the PYDF, SPC has established a Steering Committee to support and coordinate various youth activities.

Donors support a range of regional initiatives of relevance to youth employment. The Australian Aid Program, for example, provides significant support for regional education and training, enrolling students from across the Pacific at campuses in Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands and provides resources for improving the quality of vocational training. Both Australia and New Zealand both have significant scholarship programs, and also seasonal worker programs that provide employment opportunities for Pacific workers in Australia and New Zealand.

## Prospects for Developmental Leadership and the Politics of Reform

The politics of reform on youth employment at the regional level are complex and present a number of challenges for prospective developmental leadership on the issue. Major challenges include:

### The broad-fronted nature of youth issues

As at the national level, youth employment is a similarly broad-fronted issue at the regional level, making it challenging for regional organisations to grapple with. The various youth policy initiatives described in Part 1 tend to treat youth employment as one of many youth challenges. The tendency of regional policy initiatives to take a broad-fronted approach to youth issues means that employment, as a specific and significant sub-issue, tends to lose policy focus. Efforts to mainstream "youth" issues across the regional development agenda come at the expense of strong policy focus.

### Governance challenges and the constrained role of regional institutions

At a formal level, the established regional policy infrastructure means there are a range of organisations and institutional fora in which youth employment issues can be discussed. Thus, paradoxically, there is a more established collective action architecture at the regional level than in national jurisdictions. The challenge lies in effective governance. Regional organisations lack power to substantively and effectively progress policy initiatives. A significant reason behind governance challenges is the misalignment of regional-level policy interests with substantive power and resource capacities which are located at the national government level. This misalignment creates disconnect between regional organisations that recognise the policy significance of issues such as youth employment and the capacity to implement strategic policies which reside at the national level. One consequence of this misalignment is a degree of organisational impotence at the regional level, where regional organisations have limited scope to drive policy implementation and policy outcomes.

From a regional perspective, these governance challenges do not mean that regional organisations are irrelevant to the issue of youth employment, but rather that they face significant constraints which need to be acknowledged. Such organisations can have a role in supporting technical analysis and greater stakeholder coordination across national jurisdictions. A key role for regional organisations is advocacy with national governments to ensure youth employment initiatives are afforded greater political attention by national leaders. A policy paper informing the development of the PYDF noted in regard to youth issues in general:

*It is apparent that the structures and processes to support effective development and implementation of previous youth policies have been inadequate in the past. The Pacific Youth Strategy (PYS2010) required governments and development agencies to implement the strategic activities of their own accord. The review of PYS2010 highlighted the need for greater support for effective development and implementation. Coordination of implementation needs to be rigorous and effective. Importantly, coordination needs to be effective at both regional and national levels. (SPC 2013: 27).*

### Effective developmental organisations

There is limited scope for organisations at the regional level to exercise developmental leadership on youth employment issues, reflecting the reality of youth employment as a predominantly national level issue. This means that there is not a natural regional constituency for youth employment issues, with regional organisational efforts dependent on donor and regional organisation sponsorship.

The major regional youth representative body, the PYC, has played a significant role in getting youth employment issues on the agenda through smart advocacy and targeted engagement of national policy makers. PYC's campaign to have Pacific Leaders recognise the importance of youth employment was central to the adoption of the Leaders' Communique in 2011. It involved the smart use of a range of campaign techniques including focused research to frame the policy issue, capacity building of national level advocacy groups to engage with policy makers and a targeted media campaign to build political pressure for leader action. Such advocacy has been important in framing the issue of youth employment but has struggled to ensure the translation of declaratory commitments into specific action at the national level. As observed in the PYDF:

Notably, previous youth strategies, policies and political statements have not been matched with implementation plans, budgets or work programmes. For example, youth unemployment is widely recognised as a serious and growing problem in the Pacific, yet there are few targeted strategies reaching youth populations. The common preference that prevails, that broad based economic strategies will provide opportunities for youth, has been shown to be insufficient in providing opportunities for all youth ... While there have been some successful youth initiatives, few have been taken to scale to address the demand that exists. A key factor related to this is the lack of information, data and analysis on the situation of youth and the impact of youth programmes and services (PYDF 2013: 4).

At an organisational level, PYC has noted the challenges faced in progressing youth employment as a dynamic policy issue following the Leaders' Communique in 2011.

The organisational challenges that impact upon the PYC's capacity to exercise developmental leadership include resourcing and technical capacity issues. Support from PLP has been important in PYC's capacity to play a leadership role in this space.

The absence of a substantive regional constituency to engage with regional issues makes it likely that developmental leadership will be dependent on the sponsorship of regional organisations. This means that youth employment as a regional issue will abut against the broader challenges facing regional organisations. These include political constraints arising from the structure of many organisations as representative bodies of national governments, limiting their ability to forcefully advocate on policy issues.

Following on from this, the other key prospective developmental leader on youth employment at the regional level is the donor community. Donors are helping progress policy issues at the regional level through their regional programming, as members of key regional organisations such as the PIF, and through participation in regional policy fora. Donor resourcing for technical analysis and regional non-government organisations also supports a regional policy ecology that can support informed policy dialogue on youth employment issues.

## Engagement Options

While there are structural limitations in the capacity of regional organisations to drive a substantive reform program on youth employment, they have a complementary role to support national level initiatives. This includes providing technical support to inform policy decisions at the national level and advocacy support to ensure youth employment becomes a priority issue for national governments. There is also a role for regional organisations to ensure national level initiatives are well coordinated across sectors (recognising youth employment as a cross cutting issue with implications for economic, employment and social policy) and across development programs.

Recognising the structural limitations inherent in regional based organisations and their capacity to exercise effective developmental leadership on youth employment issues, the following recommendations are suggested as possible engagement options for PLP:

### Continued support for the PYC

PYC has made a significant contribution as the regional policy advocate and coordination conduit with national youth councils. Such support should be continued, but with a focus on supporting PYC's capacity to help national youth councils deepen their policy awareness of youth employment issues and opportunities discussed in previous sections. For example, PYC could coordinate a regional policy program, in collaboration with other key regional donors, on emerging labour market opportunities and the changing nature of national and regional labour markets. This could help national youth councils and national policy makers take policy choices that are informed by available information.

### Knowledge building on regional labour markets

A key focus of such efforts could be on regional labour markets and the risks and opportunities associated with regional labour market integration. Country scans for this report identified a significant lack of understanding on the significance of recent donor efforts to open regional labour markets and the policy challenges facing national governments if they are to realise long-term opportunities. PLP could work with PYC and other regional stakeholders to sponsor a regional conference on regional labour markets to build the knowledge base of national organisations so they can play a more active role in national level advocacy.

### Cross-country knowledge sharing

Using its convening power and working in close collaboration with development organisations working on youth employment at the Pacific regional level, including DFAT, PLP could support opportunities for sharing lessons learned regarding their efforts to improve youth employment outcomes between national-level stakeholders engaged with youth employment programs. In particular, knowledge sharing could focus on efforts to improve linkages between government, industry and training and education providers aimed at improving the responsiveness of skills development systems.

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