

# School Nutrition Education Programmes in the Pacific Islands: An understanding of the current situation

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## Background

The Pacific Island (PI) region faces many challenges including urbanisation, globalisation and climate change. These have resulted in significant changes to the food environment, and consequently the health of these populations, particularly children and adolescents. Schools play an important role in providing both nutrition education and an environment that supports healthy behaviours<sup>(1)</sup>, however it is unclear if students attending PI schools are exposed to school nutrition education programmes. **The aim of this study was to identify current School Nutrition Education Programmes (SNEP) across 14 PI countries.**

*For this project, a School Nutrition Education Programme is defined as an intervention to educate school students on nutrition and food preparation with the aim of influencing healthy nutrition choice and practice at an age when life time behaviour habits are developing and in the wider community.*

## Methods

The countries included in this study are; Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

**Design:** Scoping review<sup>(2)</sup>

### Data collection

- Online desk review undertaken to identify relevant background information and SNEP for each country.
- Findings validated through semi-structured interviews with 88 key stakeholders (in-person n=12 countries, via email contact n=2 countries).
- Key stakeholders included representatives from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture (or equivalent), local/International NGO's, schools (Principals and Teachers), FAO, World Health Organisation (WHO), and local not-for-profit groups.
- Interview data was returned to each stakeholder via email for verification.

### Data analysis

- The project team followed a process of thematic analysis to identify and group common themes.

Ethical approval was provided by the University of the Sunshine Coast Human Ethics Committee.



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## References

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## Findings

Thematic analysis of meeting summaries revealed three types of SNEP: curriculum; gardening; and other (incl. health promoting schools [HPS], sport-based, and school-food).

### Curriculum

- All countries had a formal education curriculum, however nutrition was not explicitly included in two countries (Table 1).
- When present, curriculum takes a similar form across all countries with benchmark standards/ learning outcomes and strands.
- Limited availability of curriculum resources for use by educators (i.e. suggested activities for learning outcomes).
- Nutrition is generally integrated into Health, Physical Education or Science subjects.

**Table 1. Nutrition curriculum status in Pacific Island countries**

Country	Nutrition curriculum		
	Primary	Secondary	Taught but no formal curriculum
Cook Islands	+	+	
Fiji	+	+	
FSM			+
Kiribati	+	+	
Nauru			+
Niue	+	+	
Palau	+	+	
RMI	+		
Samoa	+	+	
Solomon Islands	+	+	
Tokelau	+	+	
Tonga	+	+	
Tuvalu	+	+	
Vanuatu	+	+	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>

### Gardening

- Schools in all countries used garden-based activities (i.e. container gardening), but with varied and limited curriculum integration.
- Most gardening activities are supported by the Ministry of Agriculture (or equivalent).

### Other

- The Health Promoting Schools Framework (WHO) is reportedly used in six PI countries; Fiji, Niue, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.
- Formal sport related activities are used in two countries (Cook Islands: Just Play, an initiative of the Oceania Football Confederation and Tonga: NRL Wellbeing Programme).
- School food programs are currently used to varying extent in three countries; Palau (all schools with associated education for cooking staff, parents and students), Republic of Marshall Islands and Samoa (some schools).
- The Pacific Science for Health Literacy Project (PSHLP) is used in a number of schools across Cook Islands (Rarotonga) and Tonga.
- Events such as World Food Day are well supported in schools.

## Conclusion

- A range of SNEP are currently used across the PI, with majority based on curriculum and gardening, however integration of gardening activities with the curriculum is limited.