



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

PIFS (08)PSD01.02

**PRIVATE SECTOR ROUNDTABLE MEETING:
INFORMATION ON EMERGING LABOUR MARKETS, ISSUES,
CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORUM ISLAND COUNTRIES**

**Tanoa International Hotel
Nadi, Fiji**

5 – 6 June 2008

OUTCOMES DOCUMENT

The regional Private Sector Roundtable Meeting relating to information on emerging labour markets, issues, challenges and opportunities for Forum Island Countries (FICs) was held at the Tanoa International Hotel in Nadi from 5 to 6 June 2008. Officials from Departments of Trade, Labour, Foreign Affairs and Immigration from the following countries were present: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand (NZ), Niue, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Also present at the meeting were invited participants from the private sector, employers' representatives, recruiting agencies, trade unions, training providers and regional organisations.¹ The workshop was facilitated by Dr Jim Gosselin of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). A list of participants is attached as Annex I.

2. In his introductory remarks, Dr Roman Grynberg of the PIFS explained that the objective of the meeting was to exchange views and engage in discussions with private sector representatives from emerging labour markets of Australia, Guam, New Zealand and the European Union (EU). The meeting agenda allowed for discussions to enhance understanding of qualification, experience and skills requirements for employment within identified labour markets. Furthermore, the meeting established contacts between FIC

¹ Guam Department of Labour (GDOL), Guam Trades Academy, Dick Pacific Construction Company, South Pacific Marine Services, Ahrenkiel Group, German Shipowners Association, Australian Workers Union, Recruiting and Consulting Services Association, Chandler Macleod Limited, Fiji Pacific Islands Association of Australia, All Recruitment Solutions, Mr Apple, Taylor Corp, New Zealand Pacific Business Council, Madison Recruitment, Fiji School of Medicine, Fiji School of Nursing, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, University of the South Pacific, Fiji Institute of Technology, Pacific Association of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET), South Pacific Bureau for Educational Assessment, Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation, South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trade Union (SPOCTU), Building Construction and Timber Workers Union, International Labour Organisation.

Departments of Labour and potential external labour market stakeholders, such as employers, recruitment agencies, and trade unions on areas of coordination for access to specific markets. The meeting also discussed regional capacity-building issues that could assist FICs better respond to temporary labour mobility opportunities.

3. The range of participants brought forth a variety of views and differing perspectives on labour mobility issues at the national, regional and international level. Selected comments are documented below.

Contemporary Labour Mobility Issues Faced by the FICs

4. The meeting discussed that labour mobility has emerged as being one key element of an overall strategy for encouraging economic development in the FICs. Various Forum Leaders' Summits and Ministerial mandates have given direction to the development of strategies to take best advantage of emerging and identified market opportunities for temporary movement of natural persons from Pacific Forum member countries, notably in the context of progress towards the wider regional economic integration called for by Leaders.

5. The meeting recognised that governments have a major responsibility to enhance national and regional policies allowing the people of the Pacific to derive maximum benefit from existing and potential future labour mobility opportunities. Furthermore, the private sector and governments will need to continue to cooperate to facilitate market access, address supply constraints and minimise social costs to temporary movement of labour.

6. Labour mobility issues relating to facilitating market access were identified to be the cost of processing visas, issuance of work permits, contract duration, preferential agreements, linkages between employer and employee, identification and establishment of "work ready pool" and workers contact database. Supply constraints such as skills development, training, certification, cultural and linguistic barriers and accreditation were seen as a high priority both for the national and labour mobility opportunities. The meeting recognised that these issues be addressed through national and regional policy coordination initiatives as appropriate.

7. In recognising the need to retain skilled and semi-skilled persons in the FICs, it was also considered essential to have schemes that would allow low-skilled unemployed persons in the FICs as means to earn income as well as up-skilling themselves through these opportunities. While labour mobility schemes are expected to be labour market - driven, representatives from the Private Sector and Trade Unions in receiving markets acknowledged the development component of temporary labour schemes, and the need to ensure that government policies are put in place to avoid exploitation of temporary or guest workers, and to mitigate socio-economic problems associated with such schemes. Issues such as the quality of accommodation, wage rates, taxation, reasonable welfare provisions, workers' rights, health insurance and skills enhancement must be addressed by governments, employers, unions and community service organisations.

Specific Market Opportunities and Challenges

8. Private Sector speakers from Australia, Guam, New Zealand and the German Shipowners advised the meeting of specific market opportunities and challenges pertaining to occupational sectors, qualifications/skills requirements, work conditions, labour and employment laws, and visa categories. The meeting was informed that there were existing temporary labour mobility schemes from which a number of FICs could benefit from, but there was a perceived need for a more innovative schemes in developed countries in the region. The meeting noted the positive developments in Australia relating to Government consideration of a pilot temporary labour mobility scheme for the Pacific Islanders. The meeting was also informed of labour shortages within FICs and the wider region. Data was presented indicating that it should be economically feasible for the FIC workers to consider the labour market opportunities in the identified markets under temporary labour arrangements. It was acknowledged that the FICs were faced with competition from other labour market sources in an increasingly globalised market, notably from Asia. The meeting recognised that the issue of labour mobility was important to many FIC economies as part of supporting the overall development of the FICs. The initiatives by New Zealand under the NZ Recognised Seasonal Employers (RSE) scheme and Australia to consider introducing schemes for Pacific Islanders were commended. The recognition by Guam that Pacific Islanders could be utilised under existing temporary labour arrangements was widely applauded.

9. Specific challenges raised at the meeting included:

- a robust selection process to recruit people with right skills and right attitudes
- forming efficient teams with good leadership
- ensuring an effective and comprehensive induction programme in the context of pre-departure trainings
- making sure that the expectations are realistic with worker team composition around village/community/family/church groups with strong leadership
- introducing a structured approach to remittances flow to the FICs
- supporting integration at workplace and adaptation
- introducing education programs on financial management and productive utilisation of savings
- providing pastoral care
- employers' involvement in ensuring that workers have health insurance cover and were trained well for the job.

10. Suggestions on beneficial characteristics for workers included:

- adequate social and cultural adjustment programs to reduce risks of damaging social dysfunction
- good communication skills, in particular a relatively good understanding of English language

- flexibility with working hours
- productivity oriented
- team skills
- avoidance of alcohol related problems
- good health.

11. Involvement of diaspora communities and other social groups to support the adaptation of the employees in new environment was acknowledged, and their involvement from the onset in the implementation of a labour mobility scheme was deemed useful.

12. The meeting recognised that all efforts should be made to ensure that the temporary labour mobility schemes being considered and initiated in the region are well designed, and that a concerted effort is made to avoid any possible pitfalls in the scheme which may compromise success and acceptance of temporary workforces.

Challenges and Issues of FICs

13. FICs representatives highlighted major challenges and issues faced pertaining to their current labour force and market access, training and supply capacity, limitation of current labour laws, and limited and/or lack of recruitment structures. It was noted that some FICs already have liberal market access arrangements for their labour into Australia, New Zealand and USA by virtue of their historic linkages and existing skilled and semi-skilled labour provisions. Furthermore, some FICs were faced with labour shortages in identified areas, and were eager to look into flexible arrangements to facilitate the movement of labour within the FICs, possibly under the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement.

14. The meeting was informed that the current RSE scheme offered by NZ to some of the FICs was proving to be a success, both for the FICs and the employers. Being a new scheme, there were still areas for improvement that the parties could work on and a range of systems are in place to address these. Australia's support at the highest levels for formal consideration of the introduction of pilot scheme for temporary labour mobility for the Pacific Islanders was applauded, noting also the potential for such an arrangement to be linked to or incorporated into a broader trade liberalisation initiative. It was also noted by some participants that the issue of temporary movement of labour should not be seen in isolation or separately to other important trade sectors or from the issue of wider economic integration with FICs' most important trading partners, Australia and New Zealand, as envisaged by Forum Leaders.

15. It was noted that the current labour market dynamics and national economic developments needs requires the FICs to continuously invest more heavily in appropriate training and skills development to take advantage of national and regional opportunities. There were calls for education and training to be aligned with national and international markets. Views were exchanged on the need to invest in adequate training institutes (including those such as the Australia- Pacific Technical Colleges which provide trade

certification at internationally-recognised levels). This includes: stimulating private sector initiatives in provision of training, upgrading of training facilities, improvements in the basic education system, development of workforce database with skills identification provisions, strengthening of the labour laws, development of policies moderating the activities of recruitment agencies, institutional strengthening of labour and trade departments, mounting of information programs, development of effective pre-departure briefing, monitoring programmes, making opportunities available to the rural areas, etc. are among the challenges that the FICs have to overcome.

Trade Unions' Perspective

16. Participants from workers' unions from Australia and South Pacific and Oceania umbrella organisations provided an overview of key issues for consideration by the parties involved with respect to the temporary labour mobility initiatives. While supporting the initiatives for imminent development of labour mobility schemes that could provide opportunities for the FICs, they stressed that the scheme should have sufficient safeguard measures to avoid any form of worker exploitation including any erosion of prevailing market wage rates. Workers rights should be protected at all times, with the schemes to be transparent with certain minimum standards for employment and stringent quality controls. Potential social impacts relating to migrant workers will have to be considered from the onset and every attempt made to minimise any negative social impacts.

International Labour Organisation Perspective

17. The meeting was informed that while there has been increasingly freer movement of goods and financial capital in the recent years, the movement of labour on the other hand has not seen any such trend. It was noted that temporary movement of labour can create win-win situation for host source country and destination country. ILO's work on documenting practical guidelines for temporary migrant workers in the form of a handbook was brought to the participants' attention. The need to improve labour market information was emphasised, and ILO expressed support for such initiatives.

Skills Development, and Regional Training Institution Activities

18. The meeting was provided with an overview of current training programmes and mechanisms developed to deal with issues relating to certification, standardisation of accreditation, establishment of a regional qualification registry and database. Various regional agencies and training institutions from the Pacific contributed to discussions on how their programmes can contribute to the facilitation of market access and meeting domestic and external labour market requirements through skills development and training.

19. It was stressed that the FICs need to engage more actively in responding to the new labour models whereby significant demands are generated in technical and vocational areas. It was emphasised that the training institutes should develop sustainable

models of education that deliver programs which are geared towards emerging national and international temporary labour market opportunities. Allocation of appropriate resources at national and regional levels towards such capacity-building was considered important, as well as avoiding possible duplication of efforts between institutions. Other key sectors discussed were: quality standards and certification to meet international and national labour market demands and advocacy on TVET career pathways. Partnerships among the training institutes, private sector and governments were recognised as essential.

FIC Needs to Facilitate Temporary Labour Mobility

20. The meeting discussed the specific needs of the FICs to strengthen their capacities to better facilitate temporary labour mobility in ensuring that people are ‘work-ready’. Representatives from educational institutes highlighted the value in the Asian Development Bank Regional Skills Development Assessment reports becoming the basis of introducing reforms in the technical training institutions region wide, and possibly introducing a student loan scheme to support increased training in the region. This initiative could be considered further through consultations with the key stakeholders.

21. Suggested areas of actions to assist towards improvements in the supply of labour, and market access for temporary labour mobility, raised over the course of the meeting were as follows:

- a) At the sending country level, the following initiatives were raised:
- Need for better management of the facilitation aspects of existing labour schemes
 - Development of a “workforce ready database”, which includes registration of available workers, skill levels, contacts, etc at national and regional level would be useful
 - Documentation and sharing of good practises among FICs
 - Preparation of standard contracts (pro formas)
 - Creation of information brochures for all available schemes, and development of audio-visual products reflecting the experience
 - Mounting road show programmes to advertise the possibilities
 - Assist in organising recruitment drive
 - Established contacts and mechanisms for identification and screening of workers
 - Development of standard recruitment processes/ placement fees
 - Licensing and regulation of recruiters
 - Information programmes on return to home adaptation
 - Effectiveness monitoring mechanisms
 - Survey of returning workers
 - Social impact analysis of the temporary labour mobility schemes
 - Reforms of the labour laws and related legislations
 - Institutional Strengthening of the departments of labour and other departments that facilitate temporary labour mobility
 - Upgrading training institutes and education standards to meet the market needs

- Scholarship schemes to develop appropriate labour skills
- Enhanced public-private dialogue and partnership on relevant aspects of labour mobility

b) For the receiving countries:

- Ensuring easy access to health insurance for migrant workers
- Information programs for explaining contracts and agreements
- Range of pastoral care activities
- Improvements in the issuance of visas
- Financial assistance for bonds, visa fees, etc
- Systems for recognition of qualifications and vocational training from abroad
- Creation of a pool of knowledgeable workers who could provide induction crash course to new comers
- Employers to consider covering costs of accommodation, insurance, and airfares
- Ongoing training for skills development

c) At the regional level:

- Mechanisms for exchange of information on labour market needs/statistics
- A regional health insurance scheme for temporary workers
- Revolving funds for dealing with high costs relating to air fares
- Joint efforts to reduce funds transfer/remittance transaction costs
- Services market liberalisation to reduce costs in general
- Establishment of an efficient skills and qualifications recognition and accreditation schemes
- Increased role of the Pacific Island Trade and Investment Commission Offices to play an active role in ensuring the workers welfare
- Coordinated support services for temporary workers
- Taxation and tax rebates
- Low cost mechanism for remittances
- Pre-departure packages
- Reintegration into community and sustainable opportunities upon return
- Revolving funding facility
- Skills development – technical and vocational
- Development of skills availability database at national and regional levels
- Market placement activities with private sector engagement
- Possible adoption of a regional template Code of Conduct/Practice for the recruitment of temporary labour
- Enhanced public-private dialogue and partnerships, including bodies representing the private sector and employers on relevant aspects of labour mobility

22. The New Zealand RSE kick start countries also met in the margins of the meeting and discussed ways in which the Institutional Development Fund grant from the World Bank could be utilised to better facilitate the temporary labour mobility schemes.

23. Forum Island Countries expressed an interest that labour mobility schemes should be seen as complementary steps towards more innovative and beneficial arrangement in the long term, with temporary labour mobility opportunities in various other occupation categories emerging in future. The meeting discussed a number of issues, as outlined in paragraph 21 above that might be considered to address challenges and issues faced by Departments of Trade/Labour, Private Sector and Training Institutions. The meeting further noted that labour mobility facilitation was part of the more comprehensive regional economic development and integration initiatives to which Leaders have committed Forum Member countries.

Conclusion

24. The meeting also noted that regional agencies have an important role to play in assisting the FICs benefit from such temporary movement arrangements as mandated by the Forum Economic Ministers and should continue to maintain a co-ordinated approach with the Pacific Forum membership in that regard.

25. The facilitator thanked the participants for their active participation at the meeting.

6 June 2008



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05 – 06 June 2008

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6th June 2008*

