

**TRADE UNION ENGAGEMENT IN UN SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS AND SDG
REVIEW PROCESSES IN SELECTED PACIFIC COUNTRIES**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTRAV	ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities
CAS	Committee on the Application of Standards
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CIP	Country Implementation Plan
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programme
ERAB	Employment Relations Advisory Board
FTUC	Fiji Trade Union Congress
GB	Governing Body
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITC-ILO	International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
JSC	Joint Steering Committee
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LERAA	Labour and Employment Relations Act
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MTDP	Medium-Term Development Plan
NEET	Not in Employment Education or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NMIRF	National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up
NTCC	National Tripartite Consultative Council
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PCMCA	Pacific Common Multi-Country Assessment
PICTU	Pacific Islands Council of Trade Unions
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGTUC	Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SNTF	Samoa National Tripartite Forum
SSTC	South-South and Triangular Cooperation
SWC	Samoa Workers' Congress
TUDCN	Trade Union Development Cooperation Network
TWG	Technical Working Group
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNPS	United Nations Pacific Strategy
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSDSN	United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network
VNR	Voluntary National Review

1. INTRODUCTION

With the half way point of the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaching, and progress lagging behind in many areas, the overarching focus of the UN development system is to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs at all levels.¹ To make the UN system more fit for the purpose of achieving the SDGs, including the pledge to “leave no one behind”, a reform process of the UN’s development system was initiated in 2018 and is now well underway. Broadly, the aim of the reform is to better position the UN system to deliver on the SDGs by making it more integrated, more focused on ground delivery, and more accountable to national needs, while also ensuring that skills, capacities, and resources are aligned with the demands of the 2030 Agenda.²

As part of the UN reform process, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) have replaced, or are replacing, the previous generation of UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs). The roll out of UNSDCFs, or Cooperation Frameworks, mark a shift from ‘assistance’ to ‘cooperation’ and the document now guides the entire programming cycle of UN support for achieving the 2030 Agenda at the country level. It provides a framework for the UN system’s development cooperation with the country in question in terms of identifying SDG priorities and addressing remaining gaps in 2030 Agenda implementation. To identify these priorities and gaps, the formulation of UNSDCFs is preceded by a Common Country Analysis (CCA) that is based on a broad range of available UN and external data and stakeholder inputs. In turn, entity specific programming documents, such as the ILO’s Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), are derived from the UNSDCFs. While a UNSDCF is primarily a partnership agreement between the UN and the host government, it also serves as a commitment to a broad range of stakeholders and is intended to act as a vehicle for identifying development solutions through inclusive consultations and dialogue, with the aim of leaving no one behind.³

Progress in achieving the SDGs overall in the Asia Pacific has been slow and is currently not on track. It is estimated that, at the current rate of progress, 90 per cent of the 118 measurable targets will not be achieved in the region by 2030. Regrettably, one in five of the SDG indicators appear to be regressing and are in need of a complete course reversal, partly as a result of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.⁴ Goal 13 on climate action is a case in point as it continues to regress with emissions of greenhouse gases accelerating at the regional and global levels. This is of particular concern for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, which face unique vulnerabilities to the consequences of climate change, as well as several other development challenges. On Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8), Inequality (Goal 10), and Partnerships (Goal 17), the Asia-Pacific region as a whole has managed to reverse the negative trends since 2016, but there is still a need to accelerate progress across most targets in these areas.⁵

¹ See for instance UNDESA “We Need 7 Years of Accelerated, Transformative Action to Achieve SDGs.” <https://www.un.org/en/desa/we-need-7-years-accelerated-transformative-action-achieve-sdgs>.

² United Nations Website. “UN Development System Reform FAQ.” <https://reform.un.org/content/un-development-system-reform-101>. The report notes that, at the current pace of progress, it would take 42 years to reach the targets that were supposed to be reached by 2030 in the region.

³ United Nations (2019). United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Guidance. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-guidance>

⁴ UNESCAP (2023). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress report. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2023>

⁵ UNESCAP (2023). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress report.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) constitute a special case for achieving the SDGs due to their unique vulnerabilities and constraints.⁶ This is particularly evident in the Pacific, where several SIDS face common root challenges to their development, such as their remoteness and dispersion over a vast area, exposure to existential threats including rising sea levels, environmental degradation, increasingly frequent and intense tropical cyclones, as well as a high reliance on imports, high debt burdens, and a limited economic base.⁷ As a result of the limited progress in overcoming these challenges, the Pacific sub-region is not on track to meet any of the SDGs by 2030.⁸ Indeed, none of the 21 indicators that were expected to be achieved by 2020 have been met. Further, it is unlikely that Pacific SIDS will achieve even 20 per cent of the SDG targets by 2030.⁹ It should also be noted that data availability is a prerequisite to assess progress towards the SDGs and, while the availability of SDG-related data has gradually improved in Pacific SIDS, there is still a gap in availability in comparison to other groups of countries. In this regard, for the Pacific SIDS as a group, only 45 per cent of all the SDG indicators have sufficient data (with no data on over 18 per cent of indicators).¹⁰

Recent global development challenges, such as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have created additional obstacles to the realization of the SDGs both in the Pacific and beyond. While the geographical isolation of Pacific SIDS meant a relatively low number of COVID-19 cases, the social and economic impacts of the pandemic have been devastating and put the achievement of the SDGs further out of reach. In terms of decent work, the pandemic increased unemployment, underemployment, and reduced incomes, especially in the most affected sectors such as tourism, transportation, and fisheries in the Pacific. For example, in Fiji's tourism sector alone, the pandemic resulted in 150,000 job losses in 2020. Similarly, seasonal workers and workers in fisheries experienced significant job losses and declined revenue in Pacific countries as a result of the closure of borders to combat COVID-19. Overall, the unemployment rate increased by 3.7 per centage points in the Pacific in 2020, with young people and women being disproportionately affected. This has added to the region's existing challenges of high unemployment and youth unemployment rates, which prior to the pandemic already reached 23 per cent. Constituting a large majority of small Pacific business owners, and taking on the majority of domestic unpaid work, women have, as in other regions, been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic's social and economic impacts.¹¹

The rising costs of food, fuel, and finance have made the socio-economic recovery efforts more challenging by reducing the fiscal space available to governments and have added to individual financial hardship. The effects of climate change are expected to further compound these challenges in the region, for instance regarding food security.¹² To address the social vulnerabilities and inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic, there is broad agreement on the

⁶ UNSDSN "The Multidimensional Vulnerability Index and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)" <https://www.unsdsn.org/the-multidimensional-vulnerability-index-and-small-island-developing-states-sids>; See also: A/RES/69/15 - SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/samoapathway.html>

⁷ UNSDCF 2023-2027. https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/b5fe35b4-db81-40e5-982e-76319f2fe2f2_9669_UNSDF_pacific_A4_31.05.23_SHORT_FINAL_version_low_res.pdf

⁸ UNESCAP (2023). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress report; UNSDCF 2023-2027.

⁹ Pacific Islands Forum Quadrennial Report 2022 <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-06-12-PIF-Final-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ UNESCAP (2023). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress report.

¹¹ Pacific Islands Forum (2022). Second Pacific Islands Forum Quadrennial Report. <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-06-12-PIF-Final-Report.pdf>

¹² Pacific Islands Forum (2022). Second Pacific Islands Forum Quadrennial Report. <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-06-12-PIF-Final-Report.pdf>

need to increase investments and develop innovative solutions to strengthen social safety nets, create employment pathways, and build resilience to future crises.¹³

The importance of trade union engagement for accelerating SDG progress

Inclusive participation of relevant stakeholders is a cornerstone for realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its main goal of not leaving anyone behind.¹⁴ The SDGs and their indicators were developed through a wide range of consultative processes, and SDG 17 specifically recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as the key to leverage national, regional and global collaborations, mobilize resources, and exchange good practices and lessons learned during their implementation. The need for inclusion, participation, and building trust is further stressed in Our Common Agenda, which explicitly calls for the establishment of a new social contract.¹⁵ By ensuring that the societal groups who are affected by policy decisions are able to communicate their interests and needs, stakeholder participation in the design, localization, implementation, and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda acts to promote more effective policy decision-making. In addition, stakeholder participation at different levels also builds ownership and contributes to the whole-of-society approach that is needed to achieve the SDGs.¹⁶

At the national level, CCAs, UNSDCFs, and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are important entry points for stakeholder participation in the localization, implementation and follow up of the SDGs. In the drafting of CCAs, stakeholders such as trade unions are envisioned to continually review progress, gaps, risks, and opportunities to paint a picture of the evolution and current country context in relation to the SDG implementation. Following this analysis, UNSDCFs act as the main instrument for planning, implementation, and monitoring. It also sets the highest country-level development objectives and are a critical point for stakeholder participation in shaping national SDG processes.¹⁷ Furthermore, regarding 2030 Agenda follow up and review, which include VNRs, the General Assembly Resolution on the 2030 Agenda calls for such processes to be inclusive, participatory, and transparent, while supporting the reporting of all relevant stakeholders.¹⁸

Being critical champions of social progress, trade unions have an important role to play in achieving the SDGs and social development more broadly. As social partners, trade unions promote workers' rights and social protection through social dialogue and collective bargaining, and uphold freedom of association.¹⁹ Beyond giving workers a voice in shaping

¹³ See for instance: ILO (2021) Global Call to Action for a Human-Centered Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_806092.pdf

¹⁴ UNESCAP (2018). "Effective Stakeholder Engagement for the 2030 Agenda" <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Final.Effective%20Stakeholder%20Engagement%20for%20the%202030%20Agenda%20rev.pdf>

¹⁵ Report of the UN Secretary-General "Our Common Agenda." <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

¹⁶ UNDESA (2023). Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/hand-book/VNR%20Handbook%202023%20EN_0.pdf

¹⁷ Papadakis and Cauqui (2023). Social Dialogue and the Sustainable Development Goals: An Essential Synergy for Human-Centred Development and Recovery https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---dialogue/documents/publication/wcms_868729.pdf

¹⁸ General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Development. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf

¹⁹ SDG Knowledge Platform "Workers and Trade Unions" <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/workersandtradeunions>

their working conditions, trade unions can also increase workers' power to shape their communities beyond the workplace, which leads to more equitable economies and democracies, and therefore serve as a driver for achieving several of the SDGs.²⁰ The role of trade unions in realizing the 2030 Agenda is furthermore recognized in the job description of UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCs), which specifically mandates UNRCs to engage, convene, and form strategic partnerships with workers' organizations, as well as other stakeholders at the national level.²¹ In this regard, trade union organizations can be considered as special constituents with a broader economic and political mandate than other NGOs.²²

In terms of SDG-related priorities of trade unions, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has highlighted several of the SDGs as critical to the trade union movement. SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth is the hub for trade union action and is fundamental to achieving progress on other SDGs. Other priority goals highlighted by ITUC include SDG 1 on No Poverty, SDG 5 on Gender Equality, SDG 10 on Reducing Inequalities, SDG 13 on Climate Action, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and, Strong Institutions.²³ In the Pacific region, key trade union priorities within the 2030 Agenda include: addressing the high levels of informal employment and formalizing the economy; improving the conditions for seasonal migrant workers and strengthening labour mobility policies; and, mitigating and adapting to climate change, including through the development of partnerships.²⁴ The above priorities were identified at the ILO–Pacific Islands Council of Trade Unions (PICTU) Strategic Planning Meeting held in Nadi, Fiji in October 2022. Trade unions also have a role to play in addressing gender equality gaps and gender based violence, which is prevalent in the region.²⁵

Regrettably, evidence to date indicates that the level of trade union involvement in national SDG processes around the world has been uneven, which has limited their ability to pursue the priorities above. A range of factors appear to shape the quality of trade union involvement in this regard, including factors internal to the organization of trade unions, such as their capacities, level of unity and representativeness at the national level, as well as external factors, such as the RC's receptiveness and understanding of trade unions' unique role, and the overall relationship with governments.²⁶

The ILO is unique in the UN with its tripartite structure and is striving to ensure that the engagement of its tripartite constituents is realized. In this regard, the ILO has a unique role to play in creating the necessary space within the UN system and its processes for trade unions to be engaged in the realization of the SDGs.²⁷ As outlined in the ILO Governing Body's Update on the UN Reform in October 2022, progress on the involvement of social partners in UNSDCF

²⁰ Economic Policy Institute, 2021. "Unions are not only good for workers, they're good for communities and for democracy" <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-and-well-being/>

²¹ RC Generic Job Description <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/RC%20job%20description%202021.pdf>

²² Interview with ILO ACTRAV in Geneva.

²³ TUDCN (2017). Strategy on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/tudcn_agenda_2030_strategy_nov_2017_en.pdf.

²⁴ Interview with ILO ACTRAV Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

²⁵ Pacific Council of Trade Unions (PICTU) (2022), Report of the PICTU-ILO Strategic Planning Meeting.

²⁶ Papadakis and Cauqui (2023). Social Dialogue and the Sustainable Development Goals: An Essential Synergy for Human-Centred Development and Recovery https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---cd_dialogue/---dialogue/documents/publication/wcms_868729.pdf; Interview with ILO ACTRAV in Geneva.

²⁷ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP

preparation processes has been made, although significant challenges remain.²⁸ As part of its work in ensuring that the concerns and interests of workers' organizations are taken into account in policy development, the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) is working to strengthen the capacities of trade unions to better engage in the SDG processes. This study contributes to these efforts by providing a situational analysis of trade union engagement in SDG implementation planning and follow up processes in the context of Pacific SIDS.

Entering into UNSDCFs' sixth year of preparation and implementation, the time is opportune to take stock of emerging practices at the national level in terms of trade union engagement in UNSDCFs as well as CCA and VNR processes and examine their level of engagement and influence with a view towards how these can be strengthened. In the Pacific region, a new UNSDCF for the period 2023-2027 covering 14 Pacific small island states, including Fiji and Samoa, has been finalized and is now in force.²⁹ In Papua New Guinea, a new UNSDCF to follow on the 2018-2023 UNDAF is currently in design.

The role of South-South cooperation

Mutual learning and exchange through south-south cooperation has an important role to play in advancing the SDGs generally and in strengthening trade union capacities specifically. The aim of this study is to provide a situational analysis of selected Pacific countries in order to inform a south-south cooperation exchange between Pacific and Caribbean Island States on strengthening trade union engagement in UNSDCFs. While this study focuses on the Pacific, a parallel study is being conducted on the Caribbean.

South-south cooperation has proven to be consistently valuable for sharing successful practices and experiences. For instance, south-south cooperation can serve as a platform for trade unions to discuss challenges, best practices, and lessons learned in relation to driving meaningful contributions toward the achievement of the SDGs. Furthermore, through collaborations beyond specific regions, such as the Pacific, south-south cooperation can provide trade unions with an opportunity to contextualize their local efforts and develop a better understanding of how their work fits into the global picture. It can also contribute to resource mobilization efforts, through mutual learning and exchange.³⁰

The ILO supports south-south cooperation by working with governments, workers, and employers to identify, document, and disseminate good practices, facilitate exchanges and peer-to-peer learning approaches, promote knowledge-sharing, and broker agreements and memoranda of understanding. The ILO was the first UN agency with a dedicated strategy on SSTC in the form of the Governing Body (GB)-endorsed "South-South and triangular cooperation: The way forward" in 2012. During the 2018 ILC discussion, it was requested that the ILO step up its south-south cooperation.³¹

²⁸ ILO Governing Body (2022). Update on the United Nations reform.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_857734.pdf

²⁹ Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027: <https://pacific.un.org/en/237313-united-nations-pacific-sustainable-development-framework-2023-2027>

³⁰ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

³¹ ILO "SSTC in the ILO and international frameworks for development cooperation."

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@exrel/documents/genericdocument/wcms_750410.pdf

To date, trade unions' south-south cooperation has played a key role in amplifying their work on labour rights, social protection, gender equality, occupational safety and health, labour mobility, organizing workers, social dialogue, industrial relations, among other topics.³²

The remainder of this study report is organized as follows. Section two briefly lays out the conceptual and methodological framework underpinning the study. This is followed by the case studies which include the cases of Fiji (section three), Papua New Guinea (section four), and Samoa (section five) and comprise the bulk of the study report. Section six draws out the main challenges and lessons learned encountered in the different cases, while Section seven highlights best practices. Section eight concludes the study report and provides recommendations for how trade union's engagement in SDG processes can be strengthened.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual framework

This section briefly outlines the conceptual and methodological framework underlying this study of trade unions' involvement in SDG implementation planning and follow-up, which is the overarching focus of this study report.

Conceptually, the engagement of trade unions in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs is multifaceted and can be assessed from at least three different dimensions. The first dimension relates to trade unions' internal organization and capacities. This includes factors such as trade union leaders' understanding of the SDGs and how they are perceived to relate to the everyday work and priorities of trade unions, as well as trade unions' commitment to strengthening awareness and understanding around the SDGs by organizing and participating in trainings and education initiatives. It also includes trade unions' capacity to produce written outputs, such as position papers, and conduct research work on issues related to the SDGs, as well as their capacity to organize activities linked to SDG-related issues.

A second and, for this paper, critical dimension concerns trade unions' engagement with the UN, including the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and Resident Coordinator's Offices (RCOs), as well as the ILO, particularly in relation to formulation and implementation of the UN's main country-level instruments: CCAs, UNSDCFs, and where applicable, Country Implementation Plans (CIPs). This also includes assessing trade unions' collaboration with development agencies on various issues.

The third dimension of trade union engagement in SDG localization and implementation is through trade unions relations and interactions with the government on policy development and implementation. This includes trade unions' involvement in government-led SDG follow-up and review processes (Voluntary National Reviews), their role in the country's governance system, and the extent to which trade unions are consulted by the government on SDG-related issues.

Within these dimensions, a range of factors are expected to determine the level of involvement and influence of trade unions in advancing the SDGs, including in the formulation and implementation of CCAs, UNSDCFs, and VNRs. Drawing on the previous work of the ILO on

³² ITUC (2019). "Trade Unions South-South and triangular cooperation: Our contributions to the SDGs." <https://www.ituc-csi.org/trade-unions-sstc-and-sdgs>

this topic and preliminary key informant interviews with ILO ACTRAV staff, these factors broadly consist of internal organisational factors and external factors.

Factors that are internal to the organization of trade unions include the level of unity of the country's trade union movement and their ability to speak with one voice at the table, which facilitates their effective engagement. This also involves trade unions level of representativeness and democratic governance, adding to their uniqueness in comparison to other types of civil society organizations. Moreover, internal factors also include trade unions' level of appreciation of the SDGs and their related processes of planning and implementation, which can contribute to their aspiration to develop the necessary capacity and preparedness needed to effectively contribute to evidence-based policy discussions.³³ (ILO ACTRAV interview)

External factors that are outside the direct control of trade unions themselves include the receptiveness of governments and RCOs/UNCTs towards the perspectives of trade unions, including their appreciation of trade unions as unique societal actors, which varies according to changing domestic political contexts and RC priorities. The domestic legislative framework is another important external determinant of trade union engagement, as it sets the foundation for trade unions' ability to form and operate, and be recognized as legitimate stakeholders in policymaking and implementation. Further, the level of contestation of civic space can also have an impact on trade unions' ability to influence policy debates.

In examining specific consultative processes, the level of trade union involvement can be assessed through the ladder of participation,³⁴ which for the purposes of this study ranges from being informed/provided with access (transparency), to being able to provide inputs and viewpoints (dialogue/consultations), to having their inputs taken into account with concrete outcomes or at least feedback (accountability). To be meaningful, the expectation is that participation goes beyond information-sharing to include mutual dialogue where inputs are considered and taken into account by the consulting party. An additional step up the participatory ladder would involve co-creation, where stakeholders directly contribute to the creation of policies and their follow up in a more direct manner. Similarly to the ladder of participation, the UN model of stakeholder engagement delineates four levels of engagement as follows: informing; consulting; involving; and, at the highest level, collaborating.³⁵ Regularity and continuous dialogue that results in follow through is also an important factor in ensuring meaningful participation.

For the purposes of this paper, a main distinction can be made between UN-led consultative processes and government-led consultative processes. The UN-led consultative processes concern the formulation of CCAs, UNDSFs, and Country Implementation Plans. Government-led processes, on the other hand, relate to the drafting of VNRs as well as the formulation and implementation of national development policies as well as trade union engagement in the country's governance more broadly.

³³ Interview with ILO ACTRAV in Geneva.

³⁴ See for instance: Arnstein (1969). "A Ladder Of Citizen Participation." (Published online 2007.)
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944366908977225>

³⁵ UNDESA 2020. Stakeholder Engagement & the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide.
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2703For_distribution_Stakeholder_Engagement_Practical_Guide_spreads_2.pdf

Methodological framework

Methodologically, this study has been conducted through a desk review of available information and in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants.

The desk review has examined previous research and assessments on SDG progress in Pacific SIDS to provide background and context, while also examining possible opportunities for trade union engagement in UNSDCF processes and SDG processes in Pacific SIDS through publicly available information or information shared by key informants. The focus of the desk review has been to uncover specific SDG processes, opportunities, and mechanisms that exist for trade union involvement in national SDG processes in the selected countries, with the aim of painting a picture of possible opportunities of engagement, trade unions' activities, as well as ILO/UN assistance in support of that engagement.

Considering the limited amount of publicly available information on the topic of trade union engagement in SDG processes in Pacific SIDS, the desk review was complemented with in-depth interviews with key informants, which were expected to fill the gap in information available through other sources. In this regard, interviews have been conducted with the following stakeholders:

- (i) ILO Staff in Suva, Bangkok, and Geneva, (including two National Coordinators based in Fiji and Samoa, two representatives of ACTRAV in Geneva, and one representative of ACTRAV ROAP);
- (ii) Government Officials (one representative of the Ministry of Labour in Samoa);
- (iii) Trade union representatives (one representative of PNGTUC and one representative of the SWC);
- (iv) UN RCO staff (one representative of the UNRCO in Samoa and one representative of the UNRCO in Fiji).

The aim of the interviews was to bring to light the perspectives and experiences of trade unions, UN/ILO staff, and government officials to examine how trade unions have been involved and contributed to the national SDG implementation planning and follow-up processes in practice and propose concrete measures for how the engagement of trade unions in SDG processes can be enhanced. Apart from bringing out the experiences and perspectives of the stakeholders, it was also expected that the key informants would be able to identify information sources for further desk review. In some cases where it has been deemed more feasible, written exchanges with responses to interview questions being sent by email were conducted in place of virtual interviews (Fiji RCO, SWC partially). Written exchanges via email were also conducted to request additional information and clarifications following the interviews.

There were several challenges limiting the scope of this study. For one, publicly available information on trade unions' engagement in the Pacific context is scarce. Furthermore, it also proved challenging to arrange virtual interviews in the three countries with the result that not all the entities originally envisioned were able to participate in the study within its timeframe.

The cases of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa were selected for two main reasons. First, all three countries are in the process of, or have recently completed, a UNSDCF process. Second, in these three countries, there were preliminary indications of at least some level of trade union involvement in SDG processes.

3. THE CASE OF FIJI

3.1. Country introduction: SDG progress and the representation of workers in Fiji

Fiji is one of the largest Pacific SIDS and has a comparatively high level of development, with a population of just under 1 million, of which 50 per cent are under the age of 30.³⁶ It is an archipelago that consists of 332 islands, with 70 per cent of the population living on the island Viti Levu.³⁷ Fiji achieved its independence from Britain in 1970, which was followed by decades of political, social, and economic instability. However, in 2014, democratic elections were held resulting in a renewed commitment to inclusive and equitable socio-economic development. In 2016, Fiji became the first country to ratify the 2015 Paris Climate Accords, demonstrating its strong commitment to climate action.³⁸

Despite Fiji's comparatively high level of human development (ranking 2nd among Pacific Island Countries and Territories), a third of the country's population lives below the poverty line. Fiji also remains highly vulnerable to natural disasters and the effects of climate change, supply chain disruptions, economic shocks, and recent global challenges.³⁹ For instance, being highly reliant on tourism, Fiji's economy was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions, which has also had an impact on remittances, another important source of revenue for the country. The Fijian economy has also been disproportionately impacted by the global effects of the war in Ukraine, including rising food and fuel prices, which have slowed the recovery efforts from COVID-19.⁴⁰

While national-level social dialogue was nearly nullified under the previous government,⁴¹ Fiji has recently been subject to domestic political developments with implications for development policy and relations between trade unions and the government. In particular, the 2022 elections resulted in a change of government, a first through democratic means in Fiji's history, with a three-party coalition (including the People's Alliance Party, National Federation Party and the Social Democratic Liberal Party) replacing the outgoing FijiFirst government. Considering the previous government's record of repression towards civil society and trade unions, the transition of power is widely expected to lead to an expansion of the civic space available for trade unions and advancement of freedom of association and social dialogue.⁴²

SDG progress

³⁶ Government of Fiji (2023). Voluntary National Review.

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Fiji%20Report.pdf>

³⁷ CIA World Factbook: Fiji. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/fiji/>

³⁸ United Nations. The UN in Fiji: <https://pacific.un.org/en/about/fiji>

³⁹ Government of Fiji. Main Messages of the Fiji VNR Report 2023.

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Fiji%20Main%20Message.pdf>; United

Nations. The UN in Fiji: <https://pacific.un.org/en/about/fiji>

⁴⁰ Government of Fiji. Main Messages of the Fiji VNR Report 2023.

⁴¹ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

⁴² Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator; interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP; CIVICUS (2023). "Fiji's new government: a less repressive trajectory?" <https://lens.civicus.org/fijis-new-government-a-less-repressive-trajectory/>; The Guardian (Fraenkel, 2023). "Dramatic change, severe obstacles: Fiji enters 2023 with a new government, but many of the same problems." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/dramatic-change-severe-obstacles-fiji-enters-2023-with-a-new-government-but-many-of-the-same-problems>.

Fiji recognizes that the realization of the SDGs is instrumental towards building resilience to its challenges. However, according to Fiji's latest Voluntary National Review (2023), progress on the SDGs has been uneven within and across SDGs. While progress on some targets has been made, the country is still at risk of missing 75 per cent of the 97 measurable targets at the current rate of progress. Furthermore, nearly 30 per cent of the measurable targets appear to be regressing.⁴³

There is a need to accelerate progress on most of the specific SDGs of critical relevance to trade unions. On SDG 8, while the country did experience 10 consecutive years of economic growth that contributed to lowering the official unemployment rate to 4.5 per cent in 2016, the pandemic caused a reversal of this trend (real GDP declined by 17 per cent in 2020 and another 5 per cent in 2021).⁴⁴ While the most recent ILO unemployment figure for Fiji are from 2016, it is clear that the pandemic led to an unprecedented increase in unemployment with 150,000 jobs affected in tourism,⁴⁵ and 100 000 in manufacturing and commerce alone. The rate of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) stood at 20 per cent in 2016 (latest figure) and this figure had in preceding years been subject to a negative trend. Driven by a faster return of tourism than expected, Fiji's economy did rebound strongly in 2022 and this is expected to continue into the coming years.⁴⁶ In terms of the level of national compliance with fundamental labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining), Fiji scores 5.7 out of 10 according to the latest measure of ILO's labour law compliance index.⁴⁷ However, there have been several reports of the previous government undermining freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in practice.⁴⁸ On this matter, violations of Freedom of Association in Fiji have been under discussion at the ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards, which has called on the Fiji government to refrain from anti-union practices and interference in the activities of trade unions and the designation of trade unionist to tripartite fora.⁴⁹ In this regard, the current government has reinstated the country's tripartite forum and is currently undertaking a labour law review in cooperation with the ILO to improve the country's compliance with ILO standards.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the new Minister of Employment, Productivity and Industrial relations, is a former union leader (Fiji Teachers Union) and he has played a key role in breathing new life into social dialogue in Fiji.⁵¹

On SDG 1 (No Poverty), Fiji has made advancements although challenges remain. Extreme poverty and national poverty levels have seen a steady decline, although the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have had a negative impact on this trend recently. Currently, around 30 per cent of Fijians live under the national poverty line, corresponding to a quarter million people. Progress on SDG 5 (Gender equality) remains a major challenge in Fiji. For example, the female labour participation rate (37.4 %) is around half of what it is for men (76.4 %) and

⁴³ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁴⁴ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁴⁵ Pacific Islands Forum Quadrennial Report 2022.

⁴⁶ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁴⁷ ILO STATS

https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer44/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_0882_NOC_RT_A&ref_area=FJI

⁴⁸ ITUC Survey of violations of Trade Union Rights. <https://survey.ituc-csi.org/Fiji.html?lang=en#tabs-3>

⁴⁹ ILO (2020). Comments by the ILO CEACR 2020; ILO (2019) Individual Case (CAS) - Discussion: 2019, Publication: 108th ILC session.

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNT_RY_ID:4059863,103278

⁵⁰ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023; Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

⁵¹ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

appears to be stagnant.⁵² According to Fiji's 2023 VNR, only two of the SDG 5 targets could be measured—discrimination and women in leadership—and both are in need of accelerated progress. On SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities), prior to the pandemic, Fiji was one of few countries in the world in which income disparities were declining but this trend has also been reversed as a result of COVID-19's socioeconomic impacts. On SDG 13 (Climate Action), only two of five indicators are being actively measured—resilience & adaptive capacity and climate policies—both of which are in need of accelerated progress.⁵³ Fiji is one of the smallest contributors to global greenhouse emissions and has been at the forefront of international efforts to combat climate change and environmental degradation. However, due to the country's exposure to natural hazards, their increased intensity and frequency, and inadequate resilience and adaptive capacity, the number of persons impacted by climate-related disasters in Fiji has increased in recent years.⁵⁴ Concerning SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and strong institutions), according to its VNR, Fiji has only been able to measure five out of the 12 targets. Among these, the indicator on inclusive decision making has regressed and the number of unsentenced detainees has been steadily increasing.⁵⁵

Representation of workers and tripartite fora

The Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) is the national umbrella organization for the country's trade unions and is affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Representing 30 trade union affiliates including the Fiji Public Service Association, the Fiji Teachers Union, the Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union, the National Union of Hospitality, Catering and Tourism Industries Employees, and the National Union of Factory and Commercial Workers, FTUC is recognized as the main representative of workers at the national level.⁵⁶

In terms of social dialogue institutions, the highest-level tripartite forum in Fiji is the Fiji Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB), which includes representatives of FTUC, as well as representatives of employers and the government. In 2019, the ILO observed that the ERAB was not functioning due to interference by the government in the designation of social partners and called upon the government to urgently reconvene the body.⁵⁷ Following a long period of inactivity, the ERAB recently held its first tripartite meeting in a decade. The top priority of the now-functioning ERAB was to discuss critical reforms of Fiji's labour code that enable a stronger role of social dialogue and tripartism, and agree on a new DWCP that will provide a framework for the ILO's activities in the country.⁵⁸ In addition, the new government announced a list of 22 things that will be promoted during its tenure.⁵⁹

⁵² United Nations (2021). Fiji Common Country Analysis.

⁵³ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁵⁴ United Nations (2021). Fiji Common Country Analysis.

⁵⁵ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁵⁶ ILO (2010). Fiji Decent Work Country Programme. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_155749.pdf

⁵⁷ ILO (2019) Individual Case (CAS) - Discussion: 2019, Publication: 108th ILC session. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNT_RY_ID:4059863.103278

⁵⁸ FBC News (2023) "Employment Relations Advisory Board Meeting resumes." <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/employment-relations-advisory-board-meeting-resumes/>

⁵⁹ National Federation Party Fiji (2022) "22 things the NFP & PAP will do for workers when we come into government." <https://www.nfpfiji.org/post/22-things-the-nfp-pap-will-do-for-workers-when-we-come-into-government>

Due to the limited extent of functioning national-level social dialogue processes in Fiji up until 2023, social partners and the government have not been able to finalize a DWCP following the expiration of the 2010-2014 DWCP. A new DWCP is in development and, following the revival of national level social dialogue in the country, it is expected that a new DWCP will be agreed upon in the near-term.⁶⁰

3.2. Trade unions' SDG-related activities, initiatives, and partnerships

FTUC's central SDG-related priority is to protect and promote the rights of workers in Fiji, and it is also committed to promoting broader social justice issues, including gender equality, environmental sustainability, and economic fairness. This has included advocating for fair wages, safe working conditions, job security, and equal opportunities for all workers in Fiji. FTUC has also been active in pushing for national labour law reforms to align national laws with international labour standards and better protect workers' rights. A key priority of FTUC in this regard has been to ensure that freedom of association rights are upheld, considering that it underpins their ability to effectively conduct other activities.⁶¹

As a result of the recent change in government, the activities of Fiji's trade union movement as represented by FTUC, have significantly expanded in 2023. Under the previous government, which was in power for 16 years, the activities of trade unions had been severely restricted. For example, FTUC had been previously excluded by the government from participating in the meetings of the ERAB as well as other tripartite fora, such as the Wages Council, which limited their ability to participate in national-level policy discussions. Furthermore, the president of FTUC had been subject to several arrests and charges, and the offices of FTUC had on several occasions been ransacked.⁶² However, under the new administration, FTUC's leaders have been acquitted of all previous charges and, since the beginning of 2023, FTUC's participation in national social dialogue processes and policy discussions has significantly expanded through its participation in tripartite fora such as the ERAB. Pressing priorities for these tripartite fora include reviewing Fiji's Employment Relations Act and finalizing Fiji's DWCP.⁶³ In terms of domestic campaigns, FTUC has for example run campaigns aimed at raising the minimum wage in Fiji.⁶⁴

On the regional and international stages, FTUC has been active in bringing attention to the plight of workers in Fiji. For example, it has successfully filed complaints at the ILO, and raised its concerns regarding the situation of Fiji's trade union movement and its involvement in SDG processes in Fiji at the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which it has regularly participated in. FTUC has also been an active member of the ITUC-led Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN), which monitors the implementation of the SDGs from a labour rights perspective and has pushed for an increasing recognition of the role of trade unions in sustainable development discussions.⁶⁵ ACTRAV has constantly provided technical inputs in TUDCN's regular activities.

In terms of partnerships, FTUC has also been active in cultivating relationships with trade unions abroad. For example, it has developed partnerships with unions in Australia and New

⁶⁰ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁶¹ FTUC website: <https://ftuc.org.fj/about-us/>; Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁶² Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁶³ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁶⁴ FTUC Website: <https://ftuc.org.fj/4-national-minimum-wage-campaign/>.

⁶⁵ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

Zealand to better support seasonal workers and uphold their labour rights. In addition, FTUC has also been an active participant in the Pacific Islands Council of Trade Unions (PICTU).⁶⁶

3.3. SDG processes and opportunities for trade union engagement in Fiji

The current UN-led SDG implementation planning processes in Fiji are the Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2024 and the connected CCA process. In terms of government-led follow-up and review, Fiji recently presented its second VNR during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2023.

Concerning CCA processes in Fiji, a baseline multi-country assessment for the 14 Pacific countries under the umbrella of the Pacific UNSDCF was conducted in 2020 and updated in 2021 in the form of a Pacific Common Multi-Country Assessment (PCMCA). The multi-country assessment is built on country-specific CCAs, including for Fiji. The PCMCA, covering Fiji, Samoa and 12 other Pacific SIDS acts as the analytical foundation for the Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027, while also informing annual planning of governments and stakeholders as well as the Joint UN Country Action Plans.⁶⁷ While the baseline country-specific and multi-country assessments underpinning the new UNSDCF were conducted in 2020 and 2021, the CCAs are living documents that are subject to periodic updates. In this regard, the country-specific CCAs and the multi-country PCMCA will be subject to a “light” update each year to capture evolving contexts.⁶⁸ The most recent (finalized) CCA updates were conducted in 2021 as the 2022 updates of the country-specific CCAs are currently awaiting discussion by the UNCTs before being finalized.⁶⁹

The Pacific regional CCA process is led by the regional UNCT⁷⁰ through an interagency CCA taskforce, which includes technical members from the UN entities and is under the leadership of the three Resident Coordinators in Fiji, Samoa, and Micronesia.⁷¹ The CCA taskforce incorporates the inputs from all UN entities represented in the Pacific and also conducts consultations with key external stakeholders, providing an opportunity for trade unions to engage in the CCA process and inform the situational analysis.⁷²

Regarding UNSDCFs, a Cooperation Framework for the Pacific for the period 2023-2027 has been finalized and is now in force. Based on the 2021 multi-country assessment update, the Pacific UNSDCF has been prepared under the leadership of the UN RCs in Fiji, Samoa, and Micronesia. In the design stage of the UNSDCF, there is an opportunity for trade unions (and other stakeholders) to participate in the prioritization exercise and the refinement of the theory of change, and the new Pacific UNSDCF explicitly mentions the participation of workers’ organization in this regard.⁷³ Fiji was also one of the countries included in the United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS) 2018-2022, which also covered the 13 other Pacific Island States under the UN Multi Country Offices (MCOs) in Fiji and Samoa.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Interview with Fiji ILO Fiji National Coordinator; Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

⁶⁷ United Nations (2021) Pacific Common Multi-Country Assessment (PCMCA).

⁶⁸ United Nations. Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027.

⁶⁹ Information shared by UN RCO for Samoa.

⁷⁰ See <https://uninfo.org/location/241/unct-overview>

⁷¹ United Nations (2021) Pacific Common Multi-Country Assessment (PCMCA).

⁷² Fiji RCO written response to interview questions.

⁷³ United Nations. Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027; ILO (2020). The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks: Implications for the ILO and the Decent Work Country Programmes: Questions and Answers.

⁷⁴ See United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022: https://pacific.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/UNDP_WS_FINAL_UNPS_2018-2022-min.pdf

In terms of country-level implementation, drawing on the results of the evaluation of the previous UNPS,⁷⁵ Joint Steering Committees (JSCs) have been set up in all countries covered by the new UNSDCF to act as principal custodians for the implementation of the agreement. In Fiji, the JSC is co-chaired by the UN RC and the most senior government representative, and also includes UNCT members and relevant government ministries. Furthermore, the ILO's formal tripartite constituents, including workers' and employers' organizations are also represented in the Fiji JSC, providing an institutional mechanism for trade unions to participate in the country-level implementation of the UNSDCF. The Pacific UNSDCF is being further articulated through Country Implementation Plans (CIPs) for each country, which are subject to biennial updates. The implementation of the CIP will be overseen by the JSC.⁷⁶

In terms of follow up and review of the SDGs, Fiji has submitted two VNRs—in 2019 and in 2023. In contrast to the CCA/CF processes, the processes of producing the VNR is led by the government. The preparations of the 2023 VNR was overseen by a Technical Working Group (TWG), which initially consisted mainly of representatives of the government ministries. In order to make the TWG more inclusive and in line with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, representatives of “civil society”, the private sector, and development partners were included in the working group (does not explicitly mention trade unions).⁷⁷

At the national government level, the UNSDCF is also complemented by Fiji's National Development Plan (NDP) and aligns with other major strategic documents including the recently launched 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and the SAMOA Pathway. Fiji's National Development Plan consists of five-year plans as well as a longer term 20-year plan. The implementation of the initial five-year plan, which concluded in 2022, is currently being reviewed to inform the next five-year phase. In terms of alignment to the SDGs, the review undertaken by the Government of Fiji showed that 88 of the indicators in Fiji's 2017-2022 NDP are aligned with the SDGs and further alignment is expected in the next NDP.⁷⁸

3.4. Trade unions' engagement in SDG processes in practice

In the case of Fiji, the engagement of trade unions in the development of both the CCA and the UNSDCF has mainly been mediated through the ILO, which has been a key contributor to the CCA and UNSDCF documents.⁷⁹ However, FTUC, the umbrella organization of workers, has to a large extent been left out of inter-agency CCA and UNSDCF discussions.⁸⁰ This appears to be especially true in the case of the CCA, which is significant considering that the CCA informs everything that follows, including the UNSDCF. In this regard, while the RCO in Fiji ensures that trade unions are invited to take part in wider consultations related to the CCAs/UNSDCFs, the RCO has also stated that it does not directly engage with trade unions since its primary role is to coordinate the work of the UN entities.⁸¹ Consequently, it has to a large extent been the role of the ILO's Suva Office to solicit the inputs of trade unions for

⁷⁵ See United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022 Final Evaluation Report: https://minio.dev.devqube.io/uninfo-production-main/6424e5ee-cc2d-4433-8b06-54ca8b24fb7d_UNPS_Final_Evaluation_Report_170622.pdf

⁷⁶ United Nations Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027.

⁷⁷ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁷⁸ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

⁷⁹ Fiji RCO written response to interview questions.

⁸⁰ ILO Report of the ILO Asia Pacific Regional Meeting December 2022

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_866898.pdf

⁸¹ Fiji RCO written response to interview questions

inclusion in the CCA and UNSDCF and to represent Fiji's workers in inter-agency meetings and discussions, instead of FTUC.⁸² In this sense, there appears to be a lack of distinction between the ILO and its constituents in the view of the RCO, which is problematic considering that the ILO also needs to take into account the views of the government and employers organizations.⁸³ On this point, the ILO Office in Suva has been calling for invitations to any consultations on the CCA and UNSDCF that are taking place to also be extended to its constituents. Furthermore, given the often-short timeframe for the submission of inputs in the context of CCAs, the ILO Suva Office notes that it has been a challenge to actively gather the inputs from trade unions in time.⁸⁴

Due to its inactivity, ERAB, the national level tripartite forum in Fiji, has not functioned as a forum for trade unions to engage in national level SDG processes prior to 2023. This is due to the fact that FTUC was prevented from participating in the meetings of ERAB as well as other tripartite bodies (e.g., the wages council) by the previous government.⁸⁵ However, given ERAB's recent resuscitation and the welcoming back of trade unions to tripartite bodies in Fiji, ERAB can be expected to take a larger role as a consultative body in national SDG implementation processes.⁸⁶

In relation to the new UNSDCF, there has been one specific consultation meeting where trade unions in Fiji were directly engaged. Under the auspices of the ILO in collaboration with the three Pacific MCOs, a tripartite consultation involving 50 representatives of workers' and employers' organizations from 10 Pacific countries was held at the UN RC's Office in Fiji in June 2022. The main objective of the event was to consult with workers and employers in Fiji, and 10 other countries including Samoa, on the draft of the UNSDCF.⁸⁷ According to the Fiji RCO, the outcomes of this consultation were incorporated into the UNSDCF. During this meeting, there was also an opportunity for the RC to meet with trade unions directly. While other direct meetings between the RC and unions have not taken place, the RC is open to meet directly with trade unions if there is an interest and need.⁸⁸

When it comes to country-level implementation of the UNSDCF, the Fiji JSC has yet to be convened,⁸⁹ and the CIPs are currently a work in progress mainly in the hands of the UN.⁹⁰

Regarding trade unions' engagement in VNRs, the 2023 VNR lists several specific consultative meetings that were held in preparation of the report. The TWG convened a three-day SDG Forum in November 2022, which aimed to inform stakeholders about the VNR process and emphasized the role played by all stakeholders. The VNR team invited CSOs (trade unions not specified) and the private sector to participate in the TWG meeting in March 2023 and provided opportunities for CSOs to share their feedback on the latest draft of the VNR. The National Economic Summit in April 2023 provided another opportunity for consultations of

⁸² Fiji RCO written response to interview questions

⁸³ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁸⁴ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁸⁵ ILO (2019) Individual Case (CAS) - Discussion: 2019, Publication: 108th ILC session.

⁸⁶ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNT_RY_ID:4059863,103278; Interview with Fiji ILO National Coordinator.

⁸⁷ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

⁸⁸ ILO Press Release (2022) "ILO social partners prioritize Social dialogue and Human-centred recovery for the joint UN action in the Pacific." https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_848561/lang--en/index.htm

⁸⁹ Fiji RCO written response to interview questions

⁹⁰ Information shared by Fiji RCO.

⁹¹ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

stakeholders (no explicit mention of trade unions). Furthermore, an online platform was established for non-state actors (on the UNDP-hosted site solevaka.org) to share additional inputs, including stories and discussions.⁹¹

3.5. Summary

- While Fiji has a relatively high level of human development, progress towards the SDGs has been uneven and the country is at risk of missing 75 per cent of the targets where measurable data exists.
- While social dialogue was limited prior to 2023, trade unions in Fiji have been active in promoting decent work and advancing social justice, including gender equality, climate action, and economic fairness. They have also been active in bringing attention to situation of trade unions in Fiji on the regional and international scenes.
- Fiji is part of the recently launched Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027, which was preceded by country-specific and regional CCAs. Fiji recently presented its VNR for 2023. In all three processes, there are opportunities for trade unions to better engage.
- In practice, the engagement of trade unions in SDG processes has mainly been mediated through the ILO and instances of direct consultations by the RCO have been limited.

⁹¹ Government of Fiji. VNR 2023.

4. THE CASE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

4.1. Country introduction: SDG progress and the representation of workers in PNG

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest Pacific island country in terms of both landmass and population.⁹² It is located in the southwestern Pacific region and encompasses the western half of the island of New Guinea (which is shared with Indonesia) and around 600 smaller islands and atolls, totalling a landmass of 463 000 km².⁹³ With a population of 8.5 million, the country has a rich linguistic and ethnic diversity owing to its harsh and inaccessible topography, which kept arriving groups isolated from each other through history.⁹⁴ PNG's population is expected to double by 2040 and over 50 per cent are currently under the age of 24.⁹⁵ Since its independence in 1975, PNG has been democratically governed and has, in contrast to many of its neighbours, avoided military rule. However, PNG has been subject to political instability and protracted internal conflicts, which have had a negative impact on its development.⁹⁶

While the country has a rich natural resource base and has witnessed some socio-economic progress in recent times, PNG faces significant economic, social, and environmental challenges. In terms of human development, the country ranks the lowest in the whole of the Asia-Pacific region and at No. 155 globally. Over half of Papua New Guineans are classified as multidimensionally poor and 38 per cent of the population is not literate.⁹⁷ The country also suffers from high levels of inequality in various forms, with significant disparities in access to services and divides based on wealth, ethnicity, and urban or rural settings. According to the DWCP (2018), there is no comprehensive social protection system and social safety nets are lacking and critically underfunded, leaving vulnerable populations exposed to poverty and shocks. According to the most recent CCA update (2022), groups being left behind include vulnerable children, youth, women, older persons, landless people, those displaced by natural disasters, persons living with disabilities, and persons living with HIV/AIDS. Gender inequality in Papua New Guinea remains very high with the country ranking 160 out of 161 in UNDP's Gender Inequality Index rankings in 2021.⁹⁸

SDG progress

When it comes to 2030 Agenda implementation, PNG ranks 144th out of 163 countries.⁹⁹ While achievements have been made, PNG faces major challenges in achieving progress on the SDGs due to limited technical and financial capacities, lack of coordination, and poor accountability

⁹² ILO in the Pacific Website: "The ILO in Papua New Guinea." https://www.ilo.org/suva/countries-covered/papua-new-guinea/WCMS_414760/lang--en/index.htm

⁹³ Government of Papua New Guinea. VNR 2020.

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26453VNR_2020_Papua_New_Guinea_Report.pdf

⁹⁴ CIA World Factbook "Papua New Guinea": <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/papua-new-guinea/>

⁹⁵ ILO Papua New Guinea Decent Work Programme 2018-2022. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---program/documents/genericdocument/wcms_651154.pdf

⁹⁶ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis (CCA).

⁹⁷ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis.

⁹⁸ UNWOMEN "About UN Women Papua New Guinea"

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/png/about-un-women-png>

⁹⁹ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis.

and governance.¹⁰⁰ This is also the case for most of the SDGs that are priority areas to the work of trade unions.

On SDG 8, while GDP growth rates have been positive in recent years and official unemployment remains low at 2.2 per cent, the informal sector in PNG is large and formal job creation has not kept pace with labour force participation. On this point, over 80 per cent of the labour force in PNG is employed in the informal economy, predominantly in subsistence agriculture.¹⁰¹ While overall unemployment is relatively low, youth unemployment and underemployment remain a considerable challenge, with half of those registered as unemployed being under the age of 24. Moreover, a third of young people are not in employment, education, or training (NEET).¹⁰² Only a small percentage of youth enter the formal labour market each year, with the rest being either unemployed or employed in the informal economy. The youth unemployment challenge is, according to the DWCP, contributing to a deterioration of law and order and increasing rates of violence, especially towards women and girls.¹⁰³ Worryingly, the level of compliance with international labour standards on freedom of association and collective bargaining, based on ILO textual sources and national legislation, is very low at 1.1 out of 10 in 2020.¹⁰⁴

On SDG 1, a large proportion of Papua New Guineans still live in poverty. In 2022, 56.6 per cent of the population were classified as being multidimensionally poor, around 30 per cent were living below the USD 1.90 per day benchmark, and most people do not have access to basic services. With regard to SDG 5 (Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment), despite the female-to-male labour force participation rate being close to 1:1 at 96 per cent, PNG consistently ranks among the least gender equal countries in the world. In this regard, high rates of violence against women and girls and low rates of political participation are of particular concern. For instance, over half of women (aged 15-49) have experienced domestic violence and close to 30 per cent have experienced sexual violence in PNG.¹⁰⁵ The proportion of seats in parliament held by women was 0 per cent in 2022 (although this has increased to 1.7 in 2023).¹⁰⁶ On SDG 10, the share of GDP from labour has seen modest increase from 32.5 per cent in 2015 to 34.1 per cent in 2020, although this trend may have been affected by the pandemic.¹⁰⁷

While there has been progress on Climate Action (SDG 13), significant gaps remain especially when it comes to investing in adaptations to climate change, strengthening wildlife and biodiversity conservation, and environmental regulations and their enforcement. With regard to SDG 16, corruption and the perception of corruption remains highly prevalent, with 54 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted by Transparency International (2021) having paid a bribe to get a service in the public sector in the past 12 months. The number of unsentenced detainees have been increasing in the past decade, accounting for over a third of the prison

¹⁰⁰ Government of Papua New Guinea. VNR 2020 Main Messages. [https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/26204Papua New Guinea PNG VNR 2020 Main Messages.02.05.2020_700.pdf](https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/26204Papua%20New%20Guinea%20PNG%20VNR%202020%20Main%20Messages.02.05.2020_700.pdf).

¹⁰¹ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis (CCA); Written statement provided by PNGTUC.

¹⁰² United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis (CCA).

¹⁰³ ILO Papua New Guinea Decent Work Country Programme 2018-2022.

¹⁰⁴ UNSTATS <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/countryprofiles/png#goal-8>.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis (CCA).

¹⁰⁶ UNSTATS <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/countryprofiles/png#goal-5>.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis (CCA).

population in 2018. Birth registrations remain low, with only 13 per cent of children under the age of five being registered with a civil authority.¹⁰⁸

Representation of workers and tripartite fora

Created in 1974, the PNG Trade Union Congress (PNGTUC) serves as the national union organization and is affiliated to ITUC. It represents 38 trade union affiliates out of the 70 trade unions registered in the country (of which 58 are considered active).¹⁰⁹ The previous DWCP 2018-2022 highlights that PNGTUC faces significant capacity issues related to resource constraints, which affects their capacity to engage in policy dialogue, expand membership, and organize their members.

The PNG National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC) is the highest-level tripartite oversight and coordinating body. It includes representatives of PNGTUC, as well as employers, and the Department of Labour and Industrial Relations, with six seats for each entity.¹¹⁰ In the previous DWCP, it is noted that there is considerable commitment to tripartism in PNG but the results of social dialogue have been mixed due to challenges with capacity on the part of the social partners as well as the government.

4.2. Trade union activities, initiatives, and partnerships

The broad priorities of PNG's trade union movement in relation to the SDGs are decent work, gender equality, and climate action. In particular, in relation to SDG 8, formalizing workers in the informal sector and achieving SDG 8.3.1, takes the number one priority for the trade unions in PNG considering the large number of workers in the informal economy in the country.¹¹¹

Some of the key achievements of PNGTUC to date include successfully negotiating an increased minimum wage in 2013, from K2.09 per hour in 2008 to the current rate of K3.50 per hour. Further, PNGTUC was a key social partner in designing and obtaining the government's endorsement of the National Employment Policy, National Training Policy and the Labour Market Information Policy in December 2022. PNGTUC has also been active in pushing the government to ratify ILO Conventions in the past decades. For example, according to PNGTUC, in 2023, the Parliament of Papua New Guinea passed a resolution to ratify three ILO Conventions: the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) and the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81).¹¹²

Additionally, on the political front, trade unions have been actively standing up for democracy and good governance. For instance, trade unions consider themselves to be at the forefront of the fight against corruption and are demanding transparency and accountability and have played an active role in monitoring the activities of the government to ensure its decisions and programs align with the SDGs, for example by issuing media-statements. Trade unions have also been vocal on equal distribution and the fight against inequality.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis (CCA).

¹⁰⁹ PNGTUC website <https://www.pngtradeunion.com/>.

¹¹⁰ Interview with PNGTUC.

¹¹¹ Interview with PNGTUC and written statement.

¹¹² PNGTUC Written statement.

¹¹³ PNGTUC Written statement.

PNGTUC has also taken efforts to improve communications between its affiliates and conduct outreach activities with the broader public. For example, through the recent introduction of internet connectivity, PNGTUC has been able to expand the level of coordination across affiliates.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, under the workers education program, the PNGTUC has engaged with local universities to educate the future generation of workers. PNGTUC has also been active in producing and publishing articles through a bi-monthly magazine promoted through social media, including the PNGTUC's Facebook page.¹¹⁵

4.3. SDG processes and opportunities for trade union engagement

In contrast to the other Pacific countries included in this study, PNG is not part of the UN's multi-country CCAs or UNSDCF for the Pacific. Instead, PNG has a dedicated UN Country Team and Resident Coordinator, as well as separate SDG implementation planning processes including CCAs and UNDAF/UNSDCF.

The country's latest publicly available CCA dates from 2022, which is an update of the 2021 CCA and its development was led by the PNG RCO to lay the foundation for the country's upcoming UNSDCF. As the CCA is subject to annual updates, there is an opportunity for stakeholders including trade unions to continuously engage in the process.

Having been extended until 2023, PNG's UNDAF is still in force and has not yet been replaced by a UNSDCF.¹¹⁶ The status of the development of the new UNSDCF is currently listed as "in design",¹¹⁷ and according to the UN PNG 2022 Country Results Report, will be completed and signed in 2023. According to the results report, a prioritization workshop will be held in 2023 to discuss the priorities of the UNSDCF with stakeholders.¹¹⁸

Regarding follow up and review of the SDGs, PNG has so far submitted one VNR, which was done in 2020. The preparation of the VNR was led by the Government's Department of National Planning and Monitoring and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with support provided by the UN RCO. The VNR states that initial stakeholder consultations in the form of one-on-one scoping meetings and a VNR awareness workshop with the private sector and civil society, without mentioning trade unions, were held between June and September 2019. Additional rounds of stakeholder consultations were also held in March 2020 with "civil society" (without referring to trade unions). Finally, a national VNR validation workshop took place from March to April 2020. The preparation period and consultation process coincided with the introduction of COVID measures, which prevented some of the other planned consultations from taking place.¹¹⁹

National development plans include PNG Vision 2050, which is PNG's longer-term strategic plan, and the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) III 2018-2022, which translates

¹¹⁴ Interview with PNGTUC.

¹¹⁵ PNGTUC Written statement.

¹¹⁶ Regarding country-level implementation of the previous UNDAF, PNGTUC is listed as one of 143 implementing partners in the 2022 UN Country Results Report.

¹¹⁷ UN Info "Papua New Guinea". <https://uninfo.org/location/86/unct-overview>.

¹¹⁸ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Annual Results Report.

<https://papunewguinea.un.org/en/226051-annual-results-report-2022>.

¹¹⁹ Government of Papua New Guinea. VNR 2020.

Vision 2050 to a five-year action plan. A new MTDP (IV) for the period 2023-2028 was released in July 2023 by the PNG government.¹²⁰

4.4. Trade unions' engagement in SDG processes in practice

In practice, the involvement of trade unions in SDG processes in Papua New Guinea has been limited, with few instances of tangible participation of trade unions. Overall, the PNGTUC feels that it has largely been left out from policy discussions and decision-making processes in relation to the SDGs implementation planning and follow-up in PNG. This is especially the case for government-organized consultation processes.¹²¹

When it comes to PNG's CCA process, PNGTUC reports that its involvement has been limited. Notwithstanding, PNGTUC did participate in a consultation meeting organized by the ILO in October 2022 in relation to the CCA 2022 update, which centred on assessing PNG's progress towards the SDG to date. This event consisted of a workshop with break-out discussion groups, where trade unions, employers and government engaged in tripartite discussions.¹²² The 2022 CCA document does however not list PNGTUC among the stakeholders that were consulted for the CCA (although it does include the ILO).¹²³

Regarding UN-led consultations on PNG's upcoming UNSDCF, PNGTUC representatives participated in a Strategic Prioritization Workshop organized by the UN RCO in February 2023. This multi-stakeholder event focused on informing how the upcoming UNSDCF links to PNG's new Medium-Term Development Plan. While PNGTUC described it as a good workshop that provided useful background, it appears that its format was mainly informational with limited opportunities for two-way interaction.¹²⁴ Furthermore, considering that it was held at a late stage in the development of the UNSDCF and involved a broad range of stakeholders, the extent to which trade union were able to inform the content of the upcoming UNSDCF is likely to be limited.¹²⁵

When it comes trade union participation in follow-up and review of the SDGs, PNGTUC has no record of being involved in any of the consultations related to the country's 2020 VNR process.¹²⁶

Regarding participation in the formulation of national development plans in the form of the MTDP VI, PNGTUC noted that it was aware that a series of stakeholder consultations had been conducted. However, PNGTUC had not received invitations and noted that there was tendency

¹²⁰ See Government of Papua New Guinea (2023). Papua New Guinea's Medium-Term Development Plan (IV). <https://reliefweb.int/report/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-medium-term-development-plan-iv-2023-2027-national-prosperity-through-growing-economy>

¹²¹ Interview with PNGTUC.

¹²² Interview with PNGTUC and written statement.

¹²³ United Nations (2022). Papua New Guinea Common Country Analysis.

¹²⁴ Interview with PNGTUC.

¹²⁵ One of the recommendations of the 2018-2023 UNDAF evaluation for the next UNSDCF was that the UN should look to further enhance its leadership role in supporting the PNG government as the custodian of the 2030 Agenda in PNG and position itself more centrally in the national development consultative landscape. For instance, promoting national development dialogues with stakeholders and facilitating annual results conferences including a broad range of stakeholders would, according to the evaluation, serve to further this aim. (UNDAF evaluation).

¹²⁶ Interview with PNGTUC and written statement.

for PNGTUC to only be informed of such government-led consultations after they had already taken place.¹²⁷

According to the PNGTUC, the National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC) has not been involved in SDG-related processes, and generally social dialogue through the council happens on a limited and ad-hoc basis. It was noted by key informants that the tripartite body is not functioning effectively, which hampers the process of social dialogue and cooperation on SDGs in PNG. A major issue preventing the NTCC from being more engaged in SDG policy discussions is that it is, according to PNGTUC, chronically underfunded and there is little political will in the government to ensure its proper functioning as a tripartite consultative body.¹²⁸ As a result, the NTCC has not been convened since the outbreak of the pandemic.¹²⁹

Overall, while some trade unions in PNG are familiar with the concept of SDGs, a majority of trade union leaders lack an understanding of how the SDGs and SDG-related processes relate to their everyday priorities and activities.¹³⁰ The lack of a stable government and a well-functioning tripartite body are two key obstacles to advancing a higher level of awareness, and engagement. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has been disruptive to trade unions in PNG, leading to a loss of membership and internal leadership changes. This has further reduced their capacity to address broader issues and engage in issues related to the SDGs.¹³¹ Another key obstacle for PNG's trade unions to engage in SDG processes and social dialogue more broadly is that they have a relatively low level of unity and coordination, and it has been a challenge to build consensus among the trade union movement around the relevance of the SDGs.¹³²

4.5. Summary

- Papua New Guinea (PNG) faces significant challenges in realizing the SDGs due to a lack of financial and technical resources, lack of policy coordination, and poor governance.
- Trade unions in PNG are severely under-resourced, and an enabling environment for social dialogue is lacking.
- An UNDAF is in force until the end of 2023, and a new UNSDCF for 2024-2028 is currently being finalized, which has been preceded by a CCA for PNG. The country submitted a VNR in 2020.
- While opportunities exist, trade union engagement in PNG's SDG processes has been limited in practice (one ILO organized tripartite meeting in October 2022, and one UN-organized multi-stakeholder consultation in 2023). Trade unions were excluded from participation in the VNR process.

¹²⁷ Interview with PNGTUC.

¹²⁸ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP; interview with PNGTUC.

¹²⁹ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

¹³⁰ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP; interview with PNGTUC.

¹³¹ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

¹³² Interview with PNGTUC.

5. THE CASE OF SAMOA

5.1. Country introduction: SDG progress and the representation of workers in Samoa

Samoa is a tropical country located in the South Pacific with a population of around 200,000 people. It consists of two main islands (Savaii and Upolu) as well as several smaller islands.¹³³ Samoa gained independence in 1962, making it the first independent South-Pacific island nation.¹³⁴

While significant structural challenges and barriers remain, Samoa has made clear strides in terms of socio-economic development in recent years. It is one of only six countries to have graduated from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, although it remains a Small Island Developing State (SIDS).¹³⁵ In similarity with other Pacific SIDS, Samoa's geographic isolation and remoteness, small domestic market and population, vulnerability to climate change and natural hazards, uneven infrastructure, and limited governance structures are among the key structural barriers to achieving the SDGs and socioeconomic development more broadly.¹³⁶ While showing resilience, Samoa has been negatively impacted by several natural disasters and economic shocks including the 2009 tsunami, cyclones Evan (2012) and Gita (2018), as well as the closure of the Yazaki Samoa plant in 2017, which was one of the country's largest employers. Recent immediate development-challenges include the outbreak of a measles epidemic in 2019, which was followed by the global outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. These outbreaks have had a negative impact on Samoa's labour market and society, generating additional hardship for many Samoans in terms of poverty and lack of access to decent work opportunities.¹³⁷

With regard to adopting and promoting the SDGs, Samoa has been a leader in the Pacific region. It has fully aligned national development plans, such as the Strategy for Development of Samoa and national sectoral plans with the 2030 Agenda.¹³⁸ It was one of the first countries in the world to report on its development progress through a VNR, which was presented at the (first) HLPPF in 2016. Samoa also submitted a VNR report in 2020.

SDG progress

Although Samoa has been a pilot country for UN support, progress towards realizing the 2030 Agenda has been uneven across the SDGs in Samoa. While Samoa is on track to achieve or has already achieved specific SDGs including those related to education and climate action, other

¹³³ CIA World Factbook: Samoa. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/samoa/>.

¹³⁴ Government of Samoa. Pathway for the Development of Samoa FY 2021/22 – FY 2025-26. <https://www.mof.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Pathway-for-the-Development-of-Samoa.pdf>

¹³⁵ ILO Decent Work Country Programme for Samoa 2017-2023 (extended).

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_667363.pdf; Government of Samoa. VNR 2020. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26429Samoa_Samos2ndVNR2020reduced.pdf

¹³⁶ ILO DWCP for Samoa.

¹³⁷ Government of Samoa (2021). Pathway for the Development of Samoa.

¹³⁸ United Nations. "How the UN is supporting The Sustainable Development Goals in Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau." <https://samoa.un.org/en/sdgs>.

areas are lagging behind.¹³⁹ The measurement of progress is in itself a major challenge in Samoa due to the lack of data in many areas.¹⁴⁰

With regard to the SDGs of particular priority to the work of trade unions, progress has been mixed. On SDG 8, Samoa's economy saw moderate growth levels averaging around 2 per cent prior to the pandemic to a large extent supported by revenue from tourism and remittances, which declined as a result of border closures and the State of Emergency Orders. With the situation made worse by the pandemic, Samoa has experienced high levels of unemployment and inactivity, especially among women and youth. Unemployment in 2021 stood at 14.5 per cent, rising to 31.9 per cent among youth and 21.3 per cent among women. The youth NEET rate has remained stubbornly high at over 35 per cent, and the majority of Samoans were outside the formal labour force even before the pandemic.¹⁴¹ In particular, the pandemic has added to the challenge of addressing informality and gender disparities in Samoa's labour market.¹⁴²

On SDG 1, there has been a lack of progress towards nationally set poverty targets that seek to broaden economic opportunities for all—one in five Samoans live under the National Basic Needs Poverty Line.¹⁴³ Related to the lack of progress on poverty levels, Samoa has faced a major disaster or economic shock every two to three years, costing 20-30 per cent of GDP on average. Nonetheless, progress in terms of access to essential services, such as improved access to drinking water and social protection services was reported in the country's latest VNR (2020). In terms of formal social protection mechanisms, Samoa still lags behind other Pacific countries with a formal coverage of 21.1 per cent, and poverty and hardship among those who are unemployed or employed in the informal economy is relatively high. Due to the economic downturn resulting from COVID-19, economic wellbeing is being further threatened with 11 per cent of households having at least one family member who had lost their job because of COVID-related measures.¹⁴⁴

On gender equality, progress is being made albeit slowly. The female labour force participation rate increased from 32.2 per cent in 2012 to 36 per cent in 2017. However there is still a large gap in comparison to men (55 per cent). Women are also overrepresented among the unemployed, informal workers, and in unpaid work. For example, the unemployment rate among women is twice that of men, and even higher among young women. Women are furthermore underrepresented in political institutions, with only around 10 per cent female parliamentarians.¹⁴⁵ Samoa has taken steps to comply with convention 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace by amending its Labour and Employment Relations Act.¹⁴⁶ However, rates of domestic violence against women remains persistently high and there has been inadequate action on combatting this phenomenon.¹⁴⁷ The situation is likely to have been worsened as consequence of the COVID pandemic.

¹³⁹ Government of Samoa. VNR 2020.

¹⁴⁰ United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁴¹ United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁴² United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁴³ Government of Samoa. VNR 2020.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with the Government of Samoa.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

Progress on SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) has also been uneven in Samoa and proper assessment is hampered by the lack of recent data.¹⁴⁸ For example, the top 10 per cent of the population earns more than the combined earnings of the bottom 30 per cent, and the country's Gini coefficient remains high at 38.7 per cent in 2020.¹⁴⁹ As in other parts of the world, the diverging impacts of the pandemic on different sectors and groups risks exacerbating these inequalities further. In response, Samoa is currently developing its first National Social Protection Policy, which would be an important step towards expanding formal protection mechanisms and reducing income inequalities.¹⁵⁰ On SDG 13, Samoa has already met four out of eight of the SDG 13 indicators and was in 2020 on track to achieve the goal. However, given Samoa's neglectable contribution as a source of climate change and high vulnerability to its effects, the key challenge lies in improving disaster risk management, adaptation, and mitigation capacities.¹⁵¹ On SDG 16, notwithstanding Samoa's political stability and relatively low levels of violent crime, limited capacities, access to resources and technical assistance, and a lack of quality statistics and monitoring are key challenges to achieving progress on SDG 16. For example, levels of physical violence have seen concerning trends and gender-based violence in domestic settings remains a large problem, undermining peace and security. The number of birth registrations increased to around 60 per cent in 2014. Around a third of the prisoners are unsentenced.¹⁵²

Representation of workers and tripartite fora

At the national level, workers are represented by the Samoa Workers Congress (SWC), which was launched in 2014 as a national umbrella organization for the country's trade unions.¹⁵³ Consisting of eight trade union affiliates, the SWC plays a key role in bringing in Samoan workers under one umbrella and has been successful in attracting new members, building awareness and promoting labour rights, and reviving dormant trade union organizations in Samoa.¹⁵⁴

In terms of social dialogue institutions, the Samoa National Tripartite Forum (SNTF) was established in 2013 through the Samoa Labour and Employment Relations Act (LERA). In addition to representatives of the Samoa Workers Congress (SWC), the forum also includes representatives of government and employers, with four seats held by each entity. Furthermore, the ILO National Coordinator also sits as an observer in the Forum. The SNTF acts as the main tripartite forum in Samoa covering labour and employment policy, industrial relations, structural adjustments in the public and private sector, institutional reform, and more.¹⁵⁵ It has also created taskforces on several decent work and labour rights related topics, including child labour, social protection, and occupational safety and health. The LERA was amended in 2023 to strengthen the protections of trade unions activities.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Government of Samoa. VNR 2020.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁵⁰ ILO Social Protection Situation Samoa. <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowCountryProfile.action?iso=WS>.

¹⁵¹ Government of Samoa. VNR 2020.

¹⁵² United Nations (2021). Common Country Analysis for Samoa.

¹⁵³ ILO Website "Samoa Workers' Congress launched" https://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_241025/lang-en/index.htm

¹⁵⁴ ILO DWCP for Samoa.

¹⁵⁵ ILO DWCP for Samoa; Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Government of Samoa.

5.2. Trade union's activities, initiatives and partnerships

Despite capacity constraints, the Samoa Workers Congress has played an active role and many of their activities are related to the advancement of the SDG's, especially in relation to the promotion of Decent Work. For example, under the SNTF, the SWC has been part of taskforces on advancing fundamental labour standards, such as child labour and forced labour, where actions combatting these phenomena have been agreed together with employers' and the government. The SNTF has also established specific taskforces on social protection, and occupational safety and health, and has been quite active in these field according to key informants.¹⁵⁷

Regarding specific activities and accomplishments, the core of SWC's work lies in improving working conditions and eliminating poverty. Through its participation in the SNTF, it has successfully advocated for increasing the minimum wage and was active in pushing for a recent amendment to the national Labour Employment Relations Act to more closely align Samoa's legislative framework with ILO standards, for instance with regard to trade union rights, labour inspection, and violence and harassment in the workplace.¹⁵⁸ The SWC has through the Child Labour Taskforce also worked closely with the ILO office in Samoa on the topic of child labour, for instance by monitoring and analysing statistics that shed light on the scale of the phenomena and providing support to victims.¹⁵⁹ In Samoa, a common form of child labour has been children street vendors, which is an issue that has received much attention in Samoa and become a priority topic to the SNTF. The SWC has played an active role in identifying vulnerable families, conducting outreach and providing support by upskilling parents to prevent them from sending their children to work as street vendors.¹⁶⁰ The SWC has also been a strong advocate for Alliance 8.7, which is a global partnership for the eradication of modern slavery, forced labour, and the worst forms of child labour. In this regard, SWC has been advocating to get Samoa on a pathfinder status.¹⁶¹

Labour mobility is another area where the SWC has been very active. Seasonal employment in Australia and New Zealand is a pressing issue for Samoan workers due to the potential for exploitation and poor working conditions, and its impact on the domestic labour market. For example, SWC affiliates have advocated to be included in pre-departure orientations to inform outgoing workers of their rights and create realistic expectations. In partnership with the ILO, SWC have also provided trainings and reintegration programs aimed at returning workers, and compiled data on returnees.¹⁶²

In terms of partnerships, several key informants highlighted Samoan trade unions' collaboration with overseas unions in relation to seasonal work programs.¹⁶³ In particular, SWC affiliates (Samoa First Union) has formed partnerships with trade unions in Australia and

¹⁵⁷ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator; Interview with Government of Samoa.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with SWC; Interview with Government of Samoa.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with SWC; Interview with Government of Samoa.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Government of Samoa.

¹⁶² Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁶³ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator; Interview with SWC; Interview with Government of Samoa.

New Zealand, which are the two major destinations for seasonal work for Samoans, to promote better working conditions and ensure the welfare for Samoan workers overseas.¹⁶⁴

Due to capacity constraints, SWC does not regularly produce position papers on the SDGs or the UNSDCF process. It focuses on specific issues like child labour and labour law amendments and mainly works through face-to-face interactions. During COVID-19 lockdowns, the organization's efforts focused on repatriating stranded seafarers.¹⁶⁵

5.3. SDG processes and opportunities for trade union engagement in Samoa

The current or ongoing SDG implementation planning processes in Samoa consist of the Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027 and its connected CCA processes (as well as a country implementation plan). In terms of government-led follow-up and review, Samoa submitted its latest VNR in 2020.

Concerning CCA processes in Samoa, as with the case of Fiji, a baseline multi-country assessment for the 14 Pacific countries under the umbrella of the Pacific UNSDCF was conducted in 2020 and updated in 2021 in the form of a Pacific Common Multi-Country Assessment (PCMCA). The multi-country assessment is built upon country-specific CCAs, including for Samoa. As mentioned in the case of Fiji, both the country-specific and multi-country analyses are subject to annual updates in line with CF guidance,¹⁶⁶ which does provide an opportunity for trade unions, as well as other stakeholders, to engage in the CCA process in a continuous manner. A country-specific CCA for Samoa was conducted in 2021, which informed the broader Pacific analysis. The 2022 update of Samoa's country-specific CCA is currently awaiting discussion by the UNCT before being finalized.¹⁶⁷

Regarding UNSDCFs, Samoa falls under the now finalized Pacific UNSDCF for 2023-2027, which Samoa was the first country to sign.¹⁶⁸ In the design stage of the UNSDCF, as with the case of Fiji, there is an opportunity for trade unions (and other stakeholders) to participate in the prioritization exercise and the refinement of the theory of change. In this regard, the 2023-2027 UNSDCF explicitly mentions the participation of workers' organization.¹⁶⁹

To oversee country-level implementation, Joint Steering Committees (JSCs) have been set up in all countries covered by the new UNSDCF, including in Samoa, to act as principal custodians for the implementation of the agreement. In Samoa and other countries under the UNSDCF, the JSCs are co-chaired by the UN RC and the most senior government representative, and also include the UNCT members and relevant government ministries. Importantly, ILO's tripartite constituents are to be included in the JSC. The UNSDCF is being further articulated through Country Implementation Plans (CIPs) for each country, which are subject to biannual updates. Samoa's CIP has been finalized and is currently under review by

¹⁶⁴ See for instance: <https://www.apheda.org.au/samoa-first-union-on-verge-of-big-win-for-workers/> and <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/65139>)

¹⁶⁵ Interview with SWC.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations. Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027.

¹⁶⁷ Information shared by UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁶⁸ UN Samoa. Samoa signs UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023 - 2027

<https://samoa.un.org/en/203223-samoa-signs-un-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2023-2027>

¹⁶⁹ United Nations. Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027; ILO (2020). The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks: Implications for the ILO and the Decent Work Country Programmes: Questions and Answers.

the Samoan government.¹⁷⁰ The implementation of the CIP for Samoa will be overseen by the JSC.¹⁷¹

In terms of SDG follow-up and review, Samoa has submitted two VNRs to date—in 2016 and in 2020. The process of preparing the 2020 VNR was led by an SDG Taskforce chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In Samoa, a National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF) has been set up to coordinate the reporting to international commitments including the SDGs, which is also chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.¹⁷² These two mechanisms provided opportunities for the participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including trade unions, in the VNR drafting process.¹⁷³

At the national level, the UNSDCF is also complemented by the national development strategy of Samoa, entitled Pathway for the Development of Samoa as well as the longer-term roadmap Samoa 2040. The UNSDCF also aligns with other major strategic documents including the recently launched 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the SAMOA Pathway. However, as the national development strategy drafting process is led by the Ministry of Finance, which collaborates mostly with the private sector, there is not a clear opportunity for trade unions to engage in the process.¹⁷⁴

5.4. Trade unions' engagement in SDG processes in practice

Samoa trade unions, as represented by the SWC, have had a significant level of engagement in the UN-led CCA and UNSDCF processes, although there is room to further expand this engagement. In terms of follow-up and review of the SDGs, trade unions' participation in Samoa's 2020 VNR process was highlighted by all Samoan interviewees as a strong example due to the high level of trade union engagement.

Regarding CCAs, stakeholder consultations, including with trade unions, were most recently conducted between September and October 2021. The consultation process was led by the UN Samoa RCO, which set up separate conversations between the RC and different societal groups with the aim of ensuring that the CCA captured a broad range of views without leaving anyone behind. Importantly, these consultations included engaging in separate conversations with the SWC, as one of the three constituents of the SNTF, which have played a relatively active role in the SDG planning and follow up process in Samoa.¹⁷⁵ The format of the consultations consisted of presentations by the RC to set the scene, with the participants (SWC representatives/affiliates) being asked to provide their perspectives on the country situation and development context in Samoa. According to the RCO, the perspectives and information provided by the SWC was included in the CCA document and the outcomes of these consultations were subsequently used to feed into the priorities of the Pacific UNSDCF.¹⁷⁶ While the format has functioned well, key informants noted that there could have been a higher

¹⁷⁰ Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁷¹ United Nations. Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027.

¹⁷² Interview with the Government of Samoa; The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2021. Report on Country Experiences with HR-SDG Integrated National Mechanisms for Reporting, Implementation and Follow up. https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/document/COUNTRY%20EXPERIENCES%20WITH%20HR-SDG%20INTEGRATED%20NATIONAL%20MECHANISMS_ENG_accessible.pdf p.12

¹⁷³ Government of Samoa. VNR 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with the Government of Samoa.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with UN Samoa RCO; interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

degree of unity among the workers' representatives present at the table, as some SWC constituents appeared to promote the agenda of their individual union over that of the SWC to a certain extent.¹⁷⁷ However, the RCO reported that it considered the SWC to be very unified and well-organized in these consultations and generally.¹⁷⁸

Once the draft UNSDCF had been developed, an additional round of consultations was conducted by the RCO to discuss the draft with Samoan stakeholders. The consultations were held with same entities as the preceding conversations on the CCAs—SWC, employers and Governments—and feedback to the draft UNSDCF was provided by the SWC. One of the main takeaways from this consultation was that workers did not really see their local contexts and perspectives reflected in the UNSDCF considering its broad geographical and thematic scope. The RCO noted that the identification of common priorities to cover 14 countries was a key challenge in this regard, and argued that the main development challenges lies in the differences between these countries.¹⁷⁹ The constituents of the SNTF, including SWC, also participated in the regional consultations organized by the ILO that were hosted at the RCO in Fiji in June 2022.¹⁸⁰ Participants in this study were unaware of further consultations on the UNSDCF and they expressed a lack of clarity on how their inputs had been taken into account and where the process currently stands.¹⁸¹

In terms of country-level implementation of the UNSDCF in Samoa, according to the RCO, an additional round of consultations involving the same entities as the CCA and UNSDCF consultation process were also conducted to validate the CIP.¹⁸² However, other key informants noted that the CIPs had been mainly produced by the UN with limited participation by social partners.¹⁸³ While the SWC is represented in the JSC for Samoa, the committee has yet to be convened.

In terms of trade union engagement in VNR processes, all Samoan key informants underscored the high level of trade union involvement in the 2020 VNR and considered it a successful case of active trade union participation. In this process, trade unions were through the SNTF involved from the beginning up until the reporting and actively co-created the VNR document in real-time together with other relevant stakeholders through existing stakeholder engagement mechanisms.¹⁸⁴ Specifically, SNTF constituents were consulted as a group by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' SDG taskforce and through the NMIRF. Due to the COVID pandemic, the consultations were conducted virtually, which provided an opportunity for a broader range of stakeholders, including trade unions, to participate directly in the drafting process through the NMIRF, which convened virtual meetings on the VNR. Participants in these meetings reported that their inputs were directly captured in the draft VNR document in real-time during the consultations and that the drafting process was therefore highly participatory and

¹⁷⁷ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁸⁰ On this meeting, the SWC President stated that “We are grateful that the workers have been able to join the discussions on the UN’s Cooperation framework and how workers organizations can support national development priorities that will be included in Samoa’s next Decent Work Country Programme.” ILO Press Release (2022) “ILO social partners prioritize Social dialogue and Human-centred recovery for the joint UN action in the Pacific.” https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_848561/lang-en/index.htm

¹⁸¹ Interview with Government of Samoa; interview with ILO Samoa National coordinator.

¹⁸² Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁸³ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Government of Samoa; interview with SWC; Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

collaborative.¹⁸⁵ Among SNTF constituents, the Ministry of Labour took the lead as chair of the SNTF, with justifications and evidence base provided by the ILO and the groundwork being conducted by the SWC and the employers representatives.¹⁸⁶ As part of the VNR process, the SDG taskforce also organized a multi-stakeholder data validation week, through which participatory discussions and the validation of existing data were conducted with over 150 participants, including trade unions and civil society representatives. The 2020 VNR Report was thus significantly enriched as a result of the multi-stakeholder validation.¹⁸⁷ The VNR process and its participatory approach also provided an excellent opportunity to take stock of development progress in Samoa.¹⁸⁸

Overall, all Samoan key informants noted that there is a good relationship between the ILO’s Country Office, social partners, and the government through the SNTF, where discussion have to a large extent been based on consensus in line with traditional Samoan values.¹⁸⁹ In turn, the strong collaboration between the ILO and SNTF members on the one hand, and the close local collaboration between the ILO and the RCO on the other, have positively influenced the relationship between the RC and trade unions, with both the SWC and the RCO describing it in good terms. On this point, most key informants underscored the central role of the ILO National Coordinator in bringing representatives together and facilitating a close collaboration between the stakeholders.¹⁹⁰ The active role of the RC in ensuring inclusivity of trade unions in the CCA and UNSDCF consultation processes, as well as other specific issues, was also highlighted by key informants as an important component.¹⁹¹ It remains to be seen how these collaborations will be affected by the transitioning of both the RC and the ILO national coordinator.

While there is room to further institutionalize trade union participation and ensure better follow up, the continuous engagement of the same stakeholders through the SDG implementation planning process—from the CCA, to the UNSDCF, to the CIP—allowed trade union representatives to continuously feed into the SDG process to an extent. However, a shortcoming of mostly limiting consultations to the SWC is that the perspectives of workers not represented by the SWC may have been left out, although the RCO notes that it did invite other unions as well.¹⁹² In this regard, the ILO has been advocating for invitations to be sent more broadly by the RCO to ensure that no one is left behind from these dialogue processes.¹⁹³ Another shortcoming is that the time provided for stakeholders to adequately prepare for the consultations on the UNSDCF and CIP were more limited in comparison to the CCA, and it was noted that this was the case in other country contexts as well. On this point, the RCO argued that the UNSDCF and CIP processes were more “UN-heavy” and that this resulted in a more limited scope of the consultation processes.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Government of Samoa; interview with SWC.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁸⁷ UNESCAP Repository of Best Practices:

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/29453Repository_of_Good_Practicess_in_VNR_Reporting.pdf

¹⁸⁸ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Government of Samoa; interview with SWC; Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Government of Samoa; interview with SWC; interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁹¹ Interview with SWC; Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁹² Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁹³ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

On Samoan trade unions' engagement with SDG processes and the UN in general, a key point raised in UN-led consultations is that trade unions felt disconnected from the UN system and that there was a lack of clarity on how trade unions can reach out to the UN for support.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, the SWC also highlighted that, due to the many types of consultations going on and limited clarity on the process, it was a challenge to attend and adequately prepare for them all.¹⁹⁶ There is also a lack of clarity on how the different processes fit together and how they relate to trade unions' situation and activities on the ground.¹⁹⁷ For example, it is not entirely clear to workers' representatives how the DWCP will be aligned with the UNSDCF.¹⁹⁸ In general, SWC argued that there is a need for improved coordination of meetings and activities related to UN processes, which would help them prioritize participation and that it would be helpful to have an overview of the various consultation processes and how they fit into the bigger picture.¹⁹⁹

5.5. Summary

- While advances have been made, Samoa's progress towards achieving the SDGs has been uneven. The measurement of progress has itself been a challenge due to the limited amount of available data.
- Despite capacity constraints, trade unions in Samoa are well-organized and unified, and social dialogue has been highly functional in the country.
- Samoa is part of the recently launched Pacific UNSDCF 2023-2027, which was preceded and informed by country-specific and regional CCAs. Samoa submitted its latest VNR in 2020.
- While there is room for improvement, the UN in Samoa has made significant efforts to engage trade unions in SDG processes and their involvement has been relatively high. Trade unions were engaged in Samoa's VNR process to a particularly high extent.

6. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Drawing on the individual cases documented in this study, a range of challenges for trade unions to be better engaged in SDG implementation-planning and follow-up processes have been uncovered. Broadly, in line with this study's conceptual framework, these can be categorized as challenges that are internal to trade union organizations, and external challenges.

A first set of challenges relate to the capacities of trade unions themselves. First, trade unions' understanding of the SDGs in the three countries is mixed and there is a tendency to prioritize more narrow bread and butter issues over the broader development goals represented by the SDGs. Even though such issues may actually be highly relevant for the advancement of the SDGs, such as campaigns to increase the minimum wage, the connection to overarching

¹⁹⁵ Interview with UN Samoa RCO.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with SWC.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Government of Samoa.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with SWC.

development goals is not necessarily made. In this regard, there is a need to better communicate how overarching goals, such as SDG 8, and the broader 2030 Agenda relate to the work of trade unions on the ground.

On the point of capacities, overall, trade unions and their umbrella organizations in the Pacific are under-resourced and tend to be run on a volunteer basis, preventing them from participating more fully in SDG-related processes, which is time consuming and often requires resources. For example, in Papua New Guinea, PNGTUC has struggled financially in part due to affiliates not being able to pay their annual fees, which has contributed to a low capacity to participate in meetings and policy discussions. Furthermore, due to the pandemic's impact on the labour market, trade unions in the region have seen declining union memberships, resulting in diminished resources and a reduced capacity to undertake activities, which results in a vicious cycle through further loss of membership.²⁰⁰ The large numbers of workers who leave Pacific island countries through seasonal work programmes has also had a large impact on domestic trade unions' membership, finances, and in turn, their ability to conduct activities.²⁰¹ It was also noted by several key informants that the employers' organizations in the three countries are far better resourced, as they are backed by businesses, resulting in imbalances in tripartite for a and policy discussions that put trade unions at a disadvantage.²⁰²

Another internal challenge relates to the lack of coordination and communication between affiliates of the trade union movement in specific countries examined in this study. This specifically relates to the case of Papua New Guinea, where the affiliates of PNGTUC have struggled to reach consensus and speak with one voice.²⁰³ In other instances, such as Samoa, the trade union movement has been far more unified, however.

When it comes to external challenges, these relate inter alia to the structure, resources, and political will of the UN and governments to engage with trade unions as a stakeholder in the development space. For example, the receptiveness and inclusivity of the UN RCOs towards trade unions varies, in part due to the individual characteristics and experience of the RC. For instance, in Samoa the (previous) RC had experience as a minister of labour in her home country, and reportedly had a relatively high degree of understanding of the trade union movement as a unique societal actor, resulting in efforts to involve them in SDG processes.²⁰⁴ In other instances, in the absence of direct engagements between RCOs and trade unions, the ILO has by RCOs been seen as an intermediary for trade unions to engage with the UN, which has been problematic for trade unions considering that the ILO is mandated to also represent employers and governments. In this regard, a key challenge for the ILO has been to convince the wider UN system to, for instance, extend invitations to any consultations that are taking place directly to its tripartite partners and its affiliates.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, even when trade unions are invited by the UN to take part in consultations, it is generally only the national umbrella bodies that are invited, which risks leaving behind workers associated with unaffiliated unions.²⁰⁶

On the side of governments, as in the case of PNG or under the previous government in Fiji, a key challenge for trade unions to be more engaged has been the low levels of political will to

²⁰⁰ Interview with PNGTUC; interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

²⁰¹ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

²⁰² Interview with Government of Samoa; Interview with PNGTUC.

²⁰³ Interview with PNGTUC; interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

²⁰⁴ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

²⁰⁵ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

²⁰⁶ Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

create an enabling environment for effective social dialogue at the national level. For instance, in PNG, trade unions were excluded from government-led consultations and little effort has been made to ensure that tripartite bodies are adequately resourced.²⁰⁷ In Fiji, interference in the designation of representatives in tripartite fora, along with the undermining of the trade union movement generally, prevented the effective functioning of social dialogue in the country.²⁰⁸ A lesson learned in this regard is that an enabling environment for social dialogue is an important precondition for the effective engagement of trade unions in SDG processes.

On the side of the UN, a challenge has been to ensure follow up and regularity of consultations involving trade unions. Even in cases when trade union engagement has been relatively high, such as in the case of Samoa, key informants noted that follow up was lacking. For instance, it was largely unclear to key informants that had participated in consultations how their input had been taken into account and where the processes currently stood, noting that there was a lack of regularity of the consultations. A lesson learned in this regard is that regular meetings and updates, e.g. quarterly meetings, would be beneficial in terms of strengthening engagement.

Another challenge is that, despite guidance being available, some trade union representatives argued that there is a lack of overview and understanding of how the different SDG processes fit together, including with DWCPs, and how trade unions should prioritize their engagement in light of limited resources and capacities. More concrete guidance from the UN on how trade unions can engage in these processes may still be needed, and there is also a need for trade unions to invest more energy and resources if their engagement is to be enhanced. As this study has demonstrated, the UN-led SDG implementation-planning process is complex, especially in the Pacific where the structure of UN Offices further complicates matters. For example, excluding PNG, there are now three Multi-Country Offices with separate RCs covering 14 countries under one UNSDCF, with separate and joint CCA-processes and separate country implementation plans and steering committees. Further, as a result of the broad geographical and thematic scope of the new UNSDCF, a related challenge is that national trade unions struggle to see their realities reflected in such documents, making them less relevant to their everyday work.

7. BEST AND EMERGING PRACTICES

Despite the challenges above, there are also few best and emerging practices drawn from the case studies that can be highlighted in the context of trade unions' engagement in SDG processes. In particular, these relate to social partners' close institutional collaboration in Samoa, and the highly participatory approach the Samoan government adopted in the drafting of its 2020 VNR.

In the case of Samoa, representatives of the SWC, the Ministry of Labour, and the ILO National Coordinator all considered the SNTF to be an effective tripartite body for social dialogue based on the principle of consensus. The pre-existence of a well-functioning social dialogue mechanism and cordial relationship between the different actors in the SNTF facilitated the engagement of trade unions in SDG planning and implementation processes. For example, through this mechanism, where the ILO National Coordinator sits as an observer, a good relationship between the ILO tripartite partners has been developed.

²⁰⁷ Interview with PNGTUC; interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

²⁰⁸ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP; interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

By extension, the good relationship between the SWC and the ILO was also replicated to the relationship between the SWC and the RCO. Based on interviews with key informants, the ILO National Coordinator had a large role to play in cultivating these relationships and bringing the different actors together. Another aspect was that the RC herself reportedly invested time in building close relationships with various national stakeholders including the SWC.²⁰⁹

In the case of government-led consultations, the Samoa VNR process can also be highlighted as a good practice in terms of trade union (and stakeholder) engagement. In particular, the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' consultation mechanism made it possible for trade unions along with other stakeholders to contribute to the drafting of the VNR document in real-time stands out in the context of trade unions' engagement in SDG processes.

While not directly related to SDG processes, a good practice that can be found in both Fiji and Samoa is that trade unions have formed partnerships with their counterparts overseas in Australia and New Zealand. By doing so, trade unions in Fiji and Samoa have been able to promote decent working conditions for Pacific islanders engaging in seasonal work, for instance by filing complaints in collaboration with Australian and New Zealand trade unions and raise the issues relating to labour mobility in regional policy discussions.

8. ILO AND UN SUPPORT TO PACIFIC TRADE UNIONS

Trade unions are an integral part of the ILO and supporting their work is one its core tasks. Within the ILO, ACTRAV is the main department tasked with ensuring that workers' representatives can effectively participate in the ILO, and that their views and concerns are integrated at all levels. With regard to the UN reform process, ACTRAV's role also includes transmitting key reform messages to trade unions and UN entities.²¹⁰

At the country level, supporting social partners in the Pacific to develop and agree upon new DWCPs is a key priority for the ILO, especially in light of the COVID pandemic's far-reaching impact on the labour market and the need to build back better. In the Pacific, including in Fiji, Samoa, and PNG, the ILO has actively encouraged trade unions to include their agendas in the development DWCPs, which are then implemented in collaboration with governments, employers, and the ILO.²¹¹

The ILO and the UN as a whole are also implementing technical cooperation projects, for example by utilising the Joint SDG Fund, which has been referred to as the "muscle" that RCs and UNCTs can use to accelerate SDG implementation. The ILO has also launched various projects in the Pacific region aimed at improving labour standards, migration systems, compliance with labour standards (such as in the fishing sector), employment issues, and the development of national employment policies, which have also included components on strengthening the capacities of trade unions in these areas. For instance, in PNG, a USD 20 Million (EU-funded) project is being implemented to promote rural development.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Interview with SWC.

²¹⁰ ILO (2020) United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation and the Decent Work Agenda: A Trade Union Reference Manual.

²¹¹ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

²¹² Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

Looking specifically at strengthening the capacities of Pacific trade unions, ACTRAV has provided finance and training to Pacific trade unions including through supporting the work of the Pacific Islands Council of Trade Unions. For example, in October 2022, the ILO organized a series of workshops that discussed strategies to revitalize the trade union movement in the Pacific. In particular, the ILO have been supporting trade unions' regional collaboration on issues as climate change and labour mobility by promoting the engagement of PICTU in regional bodies such as the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, which has led to an increasing recognition of PICTU in such regional bodies.²¹³ In addition, the ILO has recently launched a project in Fiji and Papua New Guinea on empowering rural informal workers in partnership with PNGTUC and FTUC, with an explicit aim of strengthening the capacities of trade unions in the two countries.²¹⁴

On trade union involvement in UNSDCF processes, ACTRAV in cooperation with the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO) organized trainings for trade unionists to strengthen their capacities and understanding of the SDG processes.²¹⁵ In addition, a reference manual on trade union engagement in UNSDCF was published in 2020.²¹⁶ In the Pacific, it is also clear from the cases examined in this study that the ILO has played a large role in advancing the engagement of trade unions in CCAs and UNSDCFs, for example by organizing tripartite consultations in collaboration with RCs (e.g. June 2022 ILO workshop; ILO organized consultation on CCA in PNG in October 2022). The ILO has also been working behind the scenes to advocate for a stronger inclusion of trade unions in SDG processes and strengthening the understanding of the ILO and its constituents among RCOs.²¹⁷ The ILO has also been active in informing trade unions in the Pacific of the linkages between DWCPs and UNSDCFs.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Pacific Small Island Developing States examined in this study—Fiji, PNG, and Samoa—face significant development challenges. The 2030 Agenda offers a blueprint for addressing these challenges and build resilient, inclusive, and prosperous societies. To make that a reality, meaningful engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, including trade unions, is required. As key societal actors and representatives of workers, trade unions have an important role to play in tailoring the SDGs to local contexts and monitoring their implementation.

By examining available information and conducting interviews with a range of key informants, this study has aimed to provide a situational analysis of trade unions' engagement in the various SDG implementation-planning, follow-up, and review mechanisms that have been undertaken in the three islands countries. All three countries examined in this study are currently in the process of developing, or have recently launched, a new UNSDCF that will guide the UN's investments and activities for the next four years. All three countries have also produced VNRs within the last three years.

²¹³ Interview with ILO ACTRAV ROAP.

²¹⁴ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator.

²¹⁵ See for instance ITC-ILO "Trade Union eLearning Course on the UNSDCF and The Decent Work Agenda." <https://www.itcilo.org/courses/trade-union-elearning-course-unsdcf-and-decent-work-agenda>

²¹⁶ ILO (2020) United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation and the Decent Work Agenda: A Trade Union Reference Manual.

²¹⁷ Interview with ILO Fiji National Coordinator; Interview with ILO Samoa National Coordinator.

While trade unions in all three countries have had at least some level of engagement in CCA and UNSDCF processes, the extent to which they have been engaged has varied. The highest level of engagement of trade unions has been in the case of Samoa, where well-functioning social dialogue mechanisms were already in place, the relationship between RCO and trade unions was relatively friendly, and trade unions were more continuously involved in the various stages of the SDG implementation planning and follow up processes. In Fiji, social dialogue was hampered until December 2022, when a new government took office. Political barriers impacted the ability of trade unions to engage in SDG processes. In Papua New Guinea, resource-related capacity constraints, fragmentation, and low levels of political will to engage with trade unions resulted in trade unions feeling left out from policy discussions, despite ILO and UN efforts to involve them. However, in all three countries, there is a need to strengthen trade unions' engagement in SDG processes. While trade unions in the three countries have made efforts to increase their participation in SDG processes, for instance by participating in trainings, there is a tendency among trade unions in the three countries to view such processes as distant from their bread-and-butter issues.

While efforts are ongoing, it is clear from the challenges encountered in this study that more needs to be done to support the engagement of trade unions in SDG processes. Key informants underscored the unique role of ACTRAV in this regard, arguing that there is a need to redouble efforts to support trade unions to more effectively engage in SDG processes by strengthening the overall capacities of trade unions, enhance their understanding of how the SDGs relate to their everyday work, provide guidance on how the SDG implementation planning processes function, and strengthening the understanding among RCs and the wider UN system of the unique role of trade unions as a societal actor and development partner in achieving the SDGs.

On the UN's side, there is also a need to do more in terms of conducting outreach and providing concrete guidance on the various processes, how they relate to people's everyday lives, and how stakeholders as trade unions can engage in practice.

In order to strengthen the engagement of trade unions in SDG processes, this study recommends that:

- *UN RCOs engage more continuously and regularly with trade unions and ensure adequate follow up to consultations. This relates to the finding that there is a lack of continuity in and follow up to consultations, even where participation had been relatively high.*
- *UN RCOs and the ILO strengthen communication and outreach towards trade unions of how the SDGs relate to the everyday activities and goals of trade unions. This relates to the finding that trade unions do not always see how the SDGs relate to their core work and activities.*
- *UN RCOs (and the ILO) provide a clearer picture of the various SDG processes and how they fit together so that trade unions can prioritize their engagement in light of limited resources and capacities.*
- *UN RCOs and the ILO, including especially ACTRAV, provide clearer and more concrete guidance to trade unions on the importance of engaging in SDG processes and the opportunities and mechanisms through which they can engage in the various processes in practice.*

- *UN RCOs ensure inclusivity and share invitations to any consultations that are taking place with a broader range of workers' organizations, as some shortcomings were identified in this regard (for example in the case of Samoa).*
- *Governments, with support by the ILO, ensure that there is an enabling environment for trade unions and that tripartite fora are well functioning and adequately resourced to conduct social dialogue, as shortcomings were identified on this point in the case of Fiji and PNG)*
- *Governments and the ILO support trade unions in strengthening their overall capacities and resources that are necessary for effective engagement, as capacity challenges were identified in all three countries.*
- *Governments to a further extent involve trade unions in policy discussions in relation to the SDGs. For instance, significant shortcomings were identified in this regard in the case of PNG and Fiji.*
- *Trade unions take additional initiatives to increase their capacities and reach out to RCs and express their interest in engaging in various UN processes, as such initiatives were not always evident.*
- *Trade unions collaborate with counterparts in other countries to learn from each other's experiences through mutual exchange.*
- *Overall, more trainings for trade unions are needed to strengthen their capacity to advocate for the SDGs and engage in its processes.*

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List of Interviews

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>
ILO HQ/ACTRAV in Geneva	Sr Specialist in Workers Activities Jr Technical Officer	Mr. Grayson Koyi Mr. Laurent Mottier	May 30
ILO Regional Office Bangkok /ACTRAV	Regional Specialist, Workers' Activities	Mr. Pong-Sul Ahn	Aug 14
ILO Fiji National Coordinator	ILO National Coordinator for Fiji	Mr. Raj Bimlesh	Jul 4
ILO Samoa National Coordinator	ILO National Coordinator for Samoa	Mr. Tomasi Peni	Jul 6
PNG Trade Union (PNG Trade Union Congress)	General Secretary	Mr. Anton Sekum	Aug 8
Samoa Trade Union (Samoa Workers Congress)	Secretary	Ms. Tanya Toailoa	Jul 11
Fiji Resident Coordinator Office	Economist	Ms. Yanki Ukyab	Written responses (Jul)
Samoa Resident Coordinator Office	Data Management, Results and Reporting	Ms. La-Toya Lee	Jul 14
Samoa Ministry of Commerce Industry and Labour	Assistant CEO/Industrial Relations, Employment Permits & OSH	Mr. Lilomaiava Albert Meredith	Aug 25