

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERSHIP TOWARDS CLIMATE JUSTICE IN PACIFIC EDUCATION

A Baseline Assessment Survey of NECs in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Vanuatu and
Solomon Islands | May 2025

BY RICHARD CORNELIO | RESEARCHER, LEARNING COLLABORATIVE TEAM

1. Introduction: Problem and Context Analysis

This report presents the findings of a baseline consultation assessment conducted with four Pacific national education coalitions participating in a Learning Collaborative on climate justice in education, supported by the Education Out Loud programme. The consultation aims to identify the baseline skills, knowledge, and capacity-building needs of the NECs in relation to advancing climate justice within the education sector. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) assess NEC members' existing knowledge of climate justice and policy frameworks and (2) gather their insights and recommendations for developing and integrating climate justice into their broader education advocacy work. The findings will inform the design of participatory capacity-building initiatives under the Learning Collaborative and strengthen NECs' advocacy for quality, transformative climate change education tailored to Pacific contexts.

1.1. Impacts of Climate Change in the Pacific

The Pacific region is on the front lines of global climate change. Despite contributing only 0.03 per cent of global emissions,¹ Pacific Island countries disproportionately bear the brunt of climate change impacts. Sea-level rise, intensifying storms, and cascading environmental impacts threaten livelihoods, ecosystems, and the very survival of Pacific nations. The intensity of these climate extremes and compound natural hazards are placing enormous strain on pre-existing fragile infrastructures and communities.²

Many Pacific islands are at risk of increased coastal flooding and storm surges as they sit just one to two meters above sea level, which has risen 10–15 cm or nearly twice the global rate since the early 1990s.³ Projections indicate further rises of 25–58 cm by the mid-21st century.⁴ Such changes would be catastrophic for low-lying atolls, where even

modest increases in sea level endanger freshwater supplies and accelerate coastal erosion. Recent studies suggest that, under plausible climate scenarios, many reef islands could face instability or even uninhabitability within two to four decades in light of sea-level rise, extreme wave-driven flooding, and saltwater intrusion on groundwater sources.⁵ Mean sea surface temperatures have already risen three times faster than the global average of about 0.15 °C per decade since 1980.⁶ They have driven more intense marine heatwaves, sometimes lasting eight to 20 days or even longer since 2010⁷, causing devastating impacts on fish stocks and coral reefs. Nearly 99 per cent of reefs could be damaged, with knock-on effects on coastal food security, if warming exceeds 2 °C above pre-industrial levels.⁸

The Pacific is also witnessing more severe natural hazards. Storms, droughts, and floods (riverine and coastal) have intensified, with economic and human costs soaring.⁹ Coastal communities threatened by inundation also face migration pressures¹⁰, leading to the displacement of communities, cultures and Indigenous traditions. The “climate refugee” narrative risks reducing the solution to the contentious matter of resettlement.¹¹ Built assets near coastlines, including infrastructure critical to education, are also particularly exposed and would be costly to retrofit, let alone relocate.¹² In Tonga, for example, Tropical Cyclone Gita damaged 72 per cent of schools compared to 35 per cent of other buildings. Recent assessments suggest that 50–90 per cent of school buildings across Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu may not withstand similar high-impact weather events.¹³ Climate-induced disasters similarly interrupt learning continuity due to school closures,¹⁴ disrupting the lives of learners and teachers alike. In Vanuatu, for instance, Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020 directly affected roughly 2400 teachers from 885 schools.¹⁵ Teachers and education support personnel face not just professional but also personal challenges in the aftermath of such events.¹⁶ However, data on the long-term impacts on their well-being, financial security, and ability to deliver quality education remains scarce and under-examined.¹⁷

It is undeniable, however, that historically marginalised populations suffer the most from these direct and indirect impacts on the education sector. At the same time, education continues to be an underappreciated lever for climate change mitigation and adaptation.¹⁸ It can foster shifts in beliefs and attitudes toward the planetary crisis. Education systems can also accelerate innovation by supporting climate-focused research and technological development. In the long term, they can prepare the future workforce, through green skills training and upskilling for a shift toward sustainable development.

1.2. The Case for Climate Justice in Education

Sustainability education has figured prominently in recent mainstream discussions of education reform, often celebrated for its holistic and “transformative” potential. However, most of the literature on sustainability tends to sidestep the more overtly political dimensions of climate change, especially those tied to power, inequity, and historical accountability.¹⁹ Its mainstream practice seems reluctant to put the issues of (in)justice underlying climate vulnerability front and centre. Climate change education (CCE) hinged on climate justice offers a necessary corrective. It steers the discourse away from vague notions of collective responsibility and instead highlights the inordinate burdens borne by communities, such as those in the Pacific, that have contributed least to global carbon emissions but are now facing existential threats.

Education must move beyond a depoliticised and technocratic model of climate awareness to be fit for purpose in the face of the climate crisis. Standard environmental education risks falling short when it aims solely to promote technical knowledge or assumes undifferentiated responsibility for climate action.²⁰ Rather than treating climate change as a purely environmental concern, climate justice calls attention to asymmetries in culpability and decision-making power. It argues that CCE should not

simply teach “about” climate change but employ a justice-oriented approach, relating learners’ experiences of class, race, gender, and other categories of marginalisation to the climate crisis to help them make sense of its uneven impacts and engage critically with proposed solutions.²¹

Climate justice affirms that addressing climate change cannot be divorced from the struggle to end structural injustice, that reimagining and building equitable futures must involve those at the losing end of the crisis.²² It also offers heuristics and concepts with which to map out such futures. Among them is the framework of a just transition, originally propounded by the global trade union movement as a call to centre equity, labour rights, and social protection in climate policy.²³ Though essentially Global North in origin,²⁴ just transition has become an increasingly potent framework for education actors globally. It holistically links climate action to decent work, calls for resourcing public education as a climate adaptation strategy, and invites educators to take the lead in reskilling and upskilling workers, as well as equipping new generations of learners with know-how and skills needed for a low-carbon economy.²⁵ In the Asia-Pacific education sector, where the language of just transition is only beginning to take hold, its principles naturally extend to asserting teachers’ professional leadership and advancing education as a public good deserving of greater national investments in an age of deep uncertainty.²⁶

Any vision of a just transition in education would also be incomplete without a feminist lens. The climate crisis is a crisis of care writ large, intensified by the retrenchment of public services and other support systems for the historically underserved, including women, girls, and gender-diverse people.²⁷ In many communities, especially of colour, women are the first to lose access to these services and the last to recover from climate-related disasters. Gender-based violence also rises in such times of crisis. In 2022, for example, the prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa saw a 20 per cent increase in intimate partner violence and rape in Somalia.²⁸ Women also still largely

shoulder unpaid caregiving responsibilities, from fetching water to caring for children. Inevitably, they will be called on to do more of the same work to fill the gaps left by faltering public systems as food, water, and other essentials become ever harder to come by in a warming world.

Redistributing this invisible labour benefits all, including the education sector, where women make up the overwhelming majority of the teaching workforce, especially at the primary level, yet remain underrepresented in leadership. Feminist climate justice insists on radical inclusivity to confront these accountability gaps that inequality perpetuates.²⁹ It asserts women's agency in co-creating sustainable futures built on co-operation, intersectionality, and collective prosperity.³⁰

The call for justice in a warming world indeed amplifies the longstanding demands of social movements, from women's and Indigenous rights activists to union workers and youth climate activists, who have just as much stake in advancing critical education. Climate justice in education is thus necessarily founded on the "cognitive praxis" of these movements that generate their forms of knowledge, critique, and action.³¹ Learning through and with social movements, rather than apart from them, brings forth a more expansive CCE rooted in the values, principles, and epistemic contributions of frontline communities and defenders. It opens up new learning spaces where intergenerational, affective, and civic dimensions of learning converge. In the Pacific, where collective action often unfolds through community-based networks, such framings should resonate strongly. Indeed, they already do, as evidenced by the United Nations General Assembly's unanimous adoption, in 2022, of a resolution led by the Vanuatu Government and co-sponsored by over 100 countries calling on the International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on the obligations of states where climate change and human rights are concerned.³² A just transition campaign can build on this stance by aligning with the Pacific peoples' calls to tackle loss and damage as a precondition for reparative justice.³³

1.3. Climate Change Education: Global and Regional Perspectives

Education systems worldwide have been slow to implement CCE programmes and policies. Led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a 2021 global review of education sector plans and curricular frameworks found that while 92 per cent made some reference to environmental themes, the depth of inclusion was generally very shallow.³⁴ Less than one-fifth of documents showed moderate integration, and climate change specifically was often subsumed under more general subjects of “the environment.” Teacher preparation also lags behind: over a third of survey respondents indicated that climate-related content was absent from pre-service and in-service teacher training. Regional disparities persist, and the prevailing focus remains nominally on general environmental education rather than climate justice or climate action.

More detailed country profiles from the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, in partnership with the Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Communication and Education (MECCE) Project, support the prevalence of these patterns.³⁵ Although most countries now have some form of climate legislation or national strategy that mentions education, only a minority embed climate change explicitly in education laws or sector plans. Curricula are more likely to reference climate change (seen in about 75 per cent of countries), but only over a third have a corresponding policy for implementing and tracking progress in CCE. Systemic attention across all levels of education, as well as teacher training and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), remains limited. Thus, while CCE has gained a foothold in global education discourse, efforts are often fragmented and insufficiently effective at scale.

Governments’ engagement with education in formal climate policy documents mirrors more local trends: while CCE has gradually entered political conversations, much of the work to advance it, especially in the Pacific region, has been led by civil society and

international development partners rather than politicians and policymakers. These efforts, however, remain dispersed, project-based, and vary widely in scope and institutional anchoring across countries. An example is the Pacific Community's "Coping with Climate Change in the Pacific Island Region" (CCCPIR) programme, implemented from 2009 to 2015.³⁶ With CCE as part of its components, CCCPIR worked with national education ministries, vocational training institutions, and teacher training colleges in five Pacific countries. Notable achievements included drafting action plans linking education to climate change adaptation and disaster risk management (Kiribati), requiring climate competencies for national training qualifications (Vanuatu), and rolling out learning resources tailored to local languages and contexts (Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu).³⁷ There was initially some overlap between the CCCPIR's work and that of the education ministry in Kiribati. However, the revised CCE action plan cohered both parallel efforts to identify key areas for future CCE integration: school curriculum, teacher training, TVET, informal education, and CCE in education policy.³⁸

Despite progress in drafting a CCE action plan, Kiribati faces challenges common to many Pacific countries, such as inadequate social service infrastructure, capacity gaps in teachers' skills, staff turnover, small budgets and competing policy priorities, and duplication of efforts due to poor communication and coordination between ministries and non-state actors.³⁹ Advances building on similar initiatives remain uneven across the Pacific. Full institutionalisation, including sustained integration into national budgets, policies, and programmes, is an ongoing challenge across the Pacific. Pacific civil society actors, including NECs, must therefore take the lead in building spaces that can strengthen their role in shaping climate-responsive education systems – spaces that foster knowledge sharing, amplify advocacy capacities, and embed climate justice more firmly within education policy and practice.

2. The Pacific Education Sector

2.1. The State of Pacific Education

Education in the Pacific region has undergone shifts in policy focus over the past three decades.⁴⁰ Priorities evolved from expanding access in the 1990s to enhancing quality and labour market relevance in the 2000s, reflecting a shift towards neoliberal priorities. The 2010s emphasised innovation through digitalisation and inclusive policies accounting for gender, disability, and class barriers. Following COVID-19 disruptions and increasing climate change impacts, the 2020s policy focus has pivoted to building resilience and sustainability. These policy trajectories, alongside the need for coordinated regional action, led to the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF). Endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers in 2018, PacREF lays out a strategic blueprint aligning local educational development with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 targets.

The PacREF 2018–2030 framework operates as an agenda-setting mechanism in three four-year phases evaluated through regular ministerial review. It revolves around four key policy areas: quality and relevance of education in safe environments, equal access to multiple learning pathways, development of knowledge and skills for social contribution, and teacher empowerment through continuous development.⁴¹ Each Pacific nation incorporates relevant aspects of the framework into its national education plans.

Table 1 summarises key findings from the Pacific Community’s Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) monitoring of PacREF implementation.⁴² First, we can observe that, although notable progress has been made in increasing enrolment, especially at the primary level, major disparities remain in educational access. There

have been positive trends in reducing out-of-school rates for primary-aged children, though similar improvements are generally lacking for lower-secondary students. Per PacREF's Learning Pathways policy monitoring, early childhood education enrolment has increased overall, but upper secondary enrolment shows a concerning decline. These challenges are most pronounced in rural and remote island communities, where geography, economic hardship, and infrastructural limitations intersect.

Table 1. Key findings from the Pacific Community's monitoring, through the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 progress and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) implementation

General Policy	Findings
Indicators	
Quality and Relevance	• Generally, primary education access is high due to compulsory education policies. • Barriers persist in remote or dispersed island communities where travel or relocation is needed. • Access to early childhood education is uneven, though it is improving. • Access to information and communications technology (ICT) is variable; few primary schools have internet. • The lack of gender-separated sanitation facilities may be limiting girls' participation. • Participation remains unequal across geographic and socio-economic lines.
Learning Pathways	• Most children complete primary school due to automatic promotion policies. • Secondary school completion is lower due to limited places, exam barriers, and alternative pathways. • Out-of-school rates are relatively low overall but high in countries like Papua New Guinea.

General Policy	Findings
Indicators	
Student Outcomes	- Disparities in participation between boys and girls persist. - Poverty is a key factor in school non-attendance.
Teaching Profession	- Literacy and numeracy rates are improving, but many students still fail to meet expected levels, especially in numeracy. - Curriculum alignment and teaching quality are key areas for further improvement. - Equity in learning outcomes is a concern, especially for students with disabilities - Most countries meet regional student-teacher ratio norms at the primary level. - Teacher qualification rates are high in some parts of the region (e.g. Cook Islands, Tuvalu) but low in others, particularly in the Melanesian and Micronesian sub-regions. - Professional development opportunities remain limited in some places. - Urban-rural disparities in class sizes and teacher qualifications are common.

Student outcomes reflect mixed results. Completion rates have improved across all levels. There has also been encouraging progress in minimum literacy proficiency, although students have registered relatively lower numeracy scores. Foundational gaps in facilities and access to quality teaching continue to hinder education equity. Although most Pacific countries meet regional norms for optimal class sizes and have seen an overall increase in the number of trained teachers in primary and secondary schools, the lack of educators' professional development opportunities remains a key concern. These challenges have persisted against a backdrop of reduced government education spending since the PacREF implementation began. Digital divides and gender disparities, alongside the underrepresentation of students with disabilities,

further complicate progress. They have social implications for the future of education across the Pacific, especially as climate risks magnify existing social inequities.

2.2. The Role of National Education Coalitions

Pacific education policy involves a wide array of actors and institutions, including multilateral and regional bodies, national governments, development groups, and civil society organisations (CSOs).⁴³ While government ministries typically lead formal policy development and implementation, educational challenges in the region have necessitated collaborative approaches that engage diverse viewpoints and expertise.⁴⁴ CSOs have emerged as particularly key players, representing community voices and marginalised populations that might otherwise remain unheard in policy discussions. To understand how civil society has become instrumental in Pacific education governance, it is important to consider the historical development of education advocacy globally and its subsequent regionalisation.⁴⁵

Civil society advocacy in education has been supported by a combination of factors⁴⁶: public endorsement from international and national leaders; policy frameworks such as the Education For All (EFA) initiative⁴⁷ set in 1990; and financial support from global governance mechanisms, including multilateral and bilateral donors like the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a World Bank-hosted multistakeholder partnership and the world's largest education funding platform for education rights advocates in lower-income countries.⁴⁸ Self-formed groups of education-focused CSOs coalesced into transnational advocacy networks, arguably the largest and most successful of which is the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).⁴⁹ ActionAid and Oxfam International, alongside the Global Migration Against Child Labour and Education International, founded the GCE in 1999 in advance of the World Education Forum in Dakar.⁵⁰ It provides a civil society platform to address EFA global targets. As a broad-

based movement of CSOs, it has facilitated the formation of national education coalitions (NECs), each representing tens to hundreds of CSOs. In some countries, NECs or their predecessors (i.e. groups loosely organised around civil society action on education issues) pre-date the Dakar conference. Elsewhere, the GCE was instrumental in developing NECs, particularly in coordination with regional coalitions.⁵¹

In the Asia-Pacific, the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is the regional coalition coordinating transnational education advocacy. Established in 1964, ASPBAE now comprises over 200 CSOs across 31 countries. It maintains a formal consultative status with UNESCO and participates in education policy mechanisms, such as the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030.⁵² ASPBAE conducts research and policy analysis to strengthen advocacy across its network, with funding primarily from international development agencies. ASPBAE has aligned its advocacy for lifelong learning with the EFA agenda⁵³ and carries out independent monitoring of progress on EFA goals.⁵⁴ It strives to ensure non-discrimination in education, with particular attention to vulnerable populations across all age groups. The same ethos guides the NECs that ASPBAE coordinates and capacitates through in-person training workshops and advocacy mentorship,⁵⁵ including those it has helped establish in 22 Asia-Pacific countries.

Though ASPBAE provides regional coordination across Asia-Pacific, Pacific NECs operate within distinctive contexts while sharing structural similarities with NECs globally. These Pacific coalitions exist within a multi-level architecture where they participate in national CSO or NGO networks and regional ones like the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs.⁵⁶ Governments and international donors frequently position Pacific NECs, like their counterparts elsewhere, as the civil society “voice” in education policy processes.⁵⁷

However, NECs are considerably diverse in their capacities, resources, and policy leverage.⁵⁸ Some have successfully built platforms connecting local and international NGOs (INGOs) with parents' groups, education unions, and faith-based organisations, diversifying and expanding their coalitions substantially enough to command government attention.⁵⁹ Many others are still working to strengthen their research and advocacy capacities, mainly through external support mechanisms.⁶⁰ A key strategy across these NECs involves amplifying national demands through collaboration with INGOs on medium- to large-scale campaigns and leveraging international pressure through representation in UN system civil society bodies.⁶¹

The GPE's advocacy and social accountability fund, Education Out Loud (EOL, formerly known as Civil Society Education Fund), managed by Oxfam Denmark, has become salient in this context as the world's largest funding for CSO engagement in education planning, policy dialogue, and monitoring processes.⁶² NECs in four Pacific countries – Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu – are among the over 60 individual recipients of EOL NEC-specific grants helping them track state commitments and mobilise their (trans-)national advocacy networks around SDG 4. These NECs also participate in separately EOL-funded partnerships called Learning Collaboratives to foster their synergy, facilitate coordinated advocacy strategies around specific education sub-themes, and produce joint learning products, materials, and techniques that can be manoeuvred for broader initiatives.

2.3. Building a Climate Justice Learning Collaborative in the Pacific Education Sector

Through support from the GPE's EOL programme, a Learning Collaborative on climate justice in education has been established, bringing together four NECs from the Pacific region. The Learning Collaborative aims to strengthen civil society's role in advancing

climate justice within the education sector and provide capacity-building opportunities. The participating NECs are uniquely placed to engage in the Learning Collaborative as they operate at the intersection of community-driven advocacy and national education policy spaces. Their work is informed by the lived experiences of the diverse and marginalised groups they represent, who are most affected by climate change. They also act as focal points for civil society in fostering knowledge-building around SDG 4 targets, undertake research on education policy issues, and strengthen more inclusive participation in education decision-making across the region. This role enables the four NECs to contribute rich perspectives about equity regarding efforts seeking to mainstream climate justice in education planning and service delivery.

2.3.1. PEAN (Papua New Guinea)

Established in 2003, the Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN) is one of the oldest and most experienced NECs in the Pacific. PEAN's programming spans research, advocacy, civil society mobilisation, and capacity-building towards empowering citizens to pursue lifelong learning.⁶³ It participates in Local Education Group (LEG) meetings,⁶⁴ supports community-led data gathering, trains grassroots organisations in education policy engagement, and promotes management practices based on ethical, Christian, and culturally grounded principles.⁶⁵ It has undertaken research on literacy, gender disparities, and barriers to education access, often partnering with the education department and ASPBAE. A signature aspect of PEAN's work is the use of the GAPSED framework (Gender, Age, Place, Socioeconomic Status, Ethnicity, Disability) to mainstream equity analysis in both its internal processes and external advocacy.⁶⁶ PEAN has strategically focused on provincial and district-level engagement to align local education planning with SDG 4 commitments.⁶⁷ It has also engaged in education financing advocacy, promoting budget-tracking campaigns to address the chronic underfunding of public education systems in Papua New Guinea.⁶⁸

2.3.2. SEN (Samoa)

The Samoa Education Network (SEN) is a small but growing coalition founded in 2017 and revitalised under new leadership. It operates out of the Matuaileoo Environment Trust, Inc. (METI), a community-based organization (CBO) promoting health and sustainable livelihoods.⁶⁹ SEN draws its strength from a diverse membership that includes NGOs, faith-based organisations, farming cooperatives, and the National Teachers Association. SEN works closely with them, especially in rural communities, to raise awareness about the implications of national education policies and surface grassroots insights, particularly from youth groups.⁷⁰ Still in its formative stages, the coalition has focused chiefly on strengthening its institutional structures, broadening its membership, and building its capacities to engage in policy forums and education planning.⁷¹

2.3.3. COESI (Solomon Islands)

Established in 2004, the Coalition for Education Solomon Islands (COESI) consists of 17 NGOs working to advance equitable access to quality education. Its vision of education progress is rooted in gender and disability inclusion and the empowerment of remote island communities.⁷² COESI's advocacy has increasingly focused on making education more locally and culturally relevant.⁷³ It recognises the critical role of parents, teachers, and school leaders in fulfilling EFA goals and seeks to build their capacity to contribute meaningfully to formal education processes.⁷⁴ In so doing, the coalition has championed the integration of Indigenous knowledge and vernacular languages into the national curriculum through lessons drawn from community assessments, such as during the COVID-19 lockdowns.⁷⁵ In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, COESI continues to push for curricular reforms that better reflect the traditional livelihood practices of Solomon Islanders.⁷⁶

2.3.4. KoBLE (Vanuatu)

Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen (KoBLE), founded in 2017, is distinguished by its strong focus on technical advocacy and inclusive policy engagement. KoBLE brings together over 50 member organisations, including INGOs, local NGOs, CBOs, private and public school board councils, and the Vanuatu Teachers Union. It facilitates regular subcommittee and quarterly meetings to foster joint strategic planning. KoBLE's advocacy strategy is anchored in evidence-based approaches, such as conducting budget analyses and promoting tax justice to expand sustainable education financing.⁷⁷ It partners closely with the Ministry of Education and Training⁷⁸ and uses the GAPSED framework to train school administrators and policymakers in recognising and addressing exclusionary practices.⁷⁹ The coalition also prioritises participatory research methodologies to empower youth and community groups to document local education challenges and propose context-driven solutions. KoBLE aspires to further upscale its research activities to strengthen grassroots advocacy and enhance accountability in education policy implementation. It contributes to subregional learning initiatives with other Pacific NECs, particularly on women and youth empowerment.⁸⁰

In countries where geography and limited infrastructure impede progress in education, the four NECs' close ties to their constituencies, especially at the grassroots, help ensure that no learner is left behind in national education policy discussions. However, although the NECs are well-versed in the language of equity and inclusion in education, climate justice remains a relatively new concept and advocacy area. Recognising this need, the Learning Collaborative's first phase focuses on establishing a baseline by assessing each NEC's knowledge of climate justice and CCE policies. The aim is to identify strengths to build on and gaps to be addressed through capacity-building activities, including sessions for peer learning and climate advocacy training. This report provides an initial baseline assessment, pinpointing key learning opportunities

for NECs and setting the stage for their strategic engagement with climate justice in education.

3. Baseline Consultation Survey

3.1. Method: Focus Group Discussions

Between February and March 2025, key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from the regional coalition ASPBAE and the four Pacific NECs: PEAN (Papua New Guinea), SEN (Samoa), COESI (Solomon Islands), and KoBLE (Vanuatu). While referred to as “focus group discussions” (FGDs), the interviews were held one-on-one via Microsoft Teams or WhatsApp with each NEC’s national coordinator and/or programme officer. In practice, the approach combined elements of a key informant interview with the reflective intent of an FGD, as respondents were asked to discuss with other coalition members or members of their secretariat before the scheduled call, using a shared set of guide questions. These questions were designed to explore three major themes: (i) roadblocks in advocating for climate justice in education, (ii) capacity needs for strengthening NECs’ climate justice advocacy, and (iii) coalition perspectives on their vision for a just transition in the education sector. Listed below are the main questions (*italics*), followed by examples of the follow-up prompts, which were posed as needed, to clarify or deepen the discussions:

- What challenges in the Pacific education sector are being exacerbated by climate change?
 - What are some examples of the major challenges in achieving SDG 4 in the country or region? How is climate change affecting these pre-existing conditions?
 - What are the main policy concerns of the coalition in relation to climate change and the education sector?

- What strategies, if any, has the national or local government tried to address these issues? How effective have they been?
- What are the major roadblocks the coalition faces in advocating for climate justice in the education sector (i.e. at all levels of governance or advocacy and in awareness-raising)?
 - What is the political climate regarding discussions on climate justice in education? Is there already a high awareness of these interconnected issues?
 - Has the coalition been able to form alliances with other organisations (e.g. climate justice groups, labour unions, Indigenous organisations) to strengthen the coalition's advocacy? What challenges have emerged in these partnerships?
 - If any, what knowledge or capacity gaps in engaging with policymakers and other stakeholders could the Learning Collaborative help address?
- What skills and topics would you like to be included in the in-person workshop? How will these be helpful in your work as a coalition?
 - What specific technical or soft skills would help strengthen the coalition's climate advocacy?
 - What specific tools or frameworks of analysis would help strengthen the coalition's current or future climate justice initiatives and programmes?
 - What examples of past capacity-building efforts have been particularly useful, and how could they be improved?
- What does a just transition in the country or region look like? What does it look like for the education sector?
 - Are there existing regional or national policies that already support a just transition in education? If so, how effective are they?
 - Who should be responsible for advancing a just transition? What role should the coalition play?

- If the education sector were to transition toward more climate-responsive policies and practices, what should this transition prioritise?

A narrative synthesis approach was used to identify recurring themes and divergent views across the four NECs. The goal was to elicit the informants' insights, priorities, and framings that reflect common patterns and distinct experiences and to understand the region's emerging climate justice agenda in education.

3.1. Situating Climate Justice in Education: Regional-Level Perspective

Despite the Pacific region's acute vulnerability, education remains peripheral in the climate strategies of many Pacific countries. While global conversations have begun to acknowledge the potential of and need for CCE, this recognition has yet to meaningfully translate into Pacific policies and systems.

Besides education policy, national climate action plans can signal how seriously countries treat education as part of their climate strategies. Using content analysis, Kwauk (2021) assessed to what extent countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement approach education for climate action.⁸¹ The countries were scored according to different metrics based on the Education International Manifesto on Quality CCE for All.⁸² The findings for nine Pacific countries whose NDCs were included in the analysis are summarised in Table 2. For the climate justice metric, Kwauk (2021) used the following four guide questions as indicators: Does the policy reference climate justice? Does the NDC protect children's right to education, especially in the context of climate-related disasters and disruptions? Does the policy recognise that different groups are differentially impacted by climate change? Does the policy promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of cultures, knowledge, epistemologies, and other ways of knowing and being?

Table 2. Overall and specific scores of each Pacific country on their level of policy ambition for quality climate change education (CCE) (adapted from Kwauk, 2021). Countries in bold are the countries of origin of the national education coalitions (NECs) participating in the Learning Collaborative.

Country	Overall Score	Policy Ambition	Pervasiveness	Inclusion	Quality of CCE	Climate Justice	System Strengthening
Australia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fiji	0.06	0	0	0.33	0	0	0
New Zealand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Papua New Guinea	0.10	0	0	0.33	0	0.25	0
Rep. of the Marshall Islands	0.33	0.33	0.67	0.33	0.13	0.25	0.30
Samoa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Solomon Islands	0.08	0	0	0.33	0.13	0	0.10
Tonga	0.06	0	0	0	0.13	0.25	0
Vanuatu	0.19	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.13	0	0

Kwauk's (2021) findings were sobering: every country received a failing grade on integrating CCE into their NDCs. Fewer than one-third of all NDCs even mention CCE, mostly from countries that are both highly climate-vulnerable and least responsible for global emissions. Despite the acknowledged importance of education for mitigation and adaptation, no country has yet committed to making CCE compulsory.⁸³

In the Pacific, the trend reflects this pattern but shows some promising exceptions. For example, Vanuatu, for which rising seas and intensifying storms are increasingly

becoming common, has made stronger mentions of education. Notably, Vanuatu's updated NDC ahead of the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2022 significantly improved, becoming one of only five worldwide to acknowledge young people's right to education and one of just two to frame this within the context of climate disruptions explicitly.⁸⁴ Vanuatu's NDC further commits to integrating Indigenous knowledge into curricula and recognising the gendered vulnerabilities that climate change exacerbates.

Among the four Pacific countries whose NECs form part of the Learning Collaborative, the treatment of education in NDCs is uneven. Papua New Guinea's NDC references youth not only as a vulnerable group and beneficiary but also as a stakeholder and agent of change. The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu position children and youth primarily as vulnerable groups and beneficiaries of climate interventions. Meanwhile, Samoa's NDC omits any reference to education, youth, or children at all in the climate context.

With national commitments to climate justice lagging behind, efforts to elevate the role of education in climate action have often fallen to civil society actors. Among them, at the regional level, ASPBAE has undertaken initiatives to endorse CCE, situating it within the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework, especially during the coalition's earlier involvement during the UN Decade on ESD (2005–2014). ASPBAE has more recently convened regional meetings and issued a policy brief framing CCE as an emerging need. It has supported some NECs (COESI and SEN) from countries undergoing Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on SDG 4 implementation in preparing Spotlight Reports.⁸⁵ It has also hosted discussions on climate-smart education and the value of data education in emergencies.⁸⁶ Participation from Pacific NECs was telling: it signalled a strong need to strengthen education sector responses to disasters, especially those caused or compounded by climate change, said EOL Regional Coordinator Florence May Cortina.

The education sector's precarity complicates efforts to envision what a just transition in education might look like for the Pacific. As Cortina observed, the challenge goes beyond curriculum reform. "Basically, these South Pacific countries have very little money, and so the first challenge would be in education financing, especially if the schools are always destroyed because of the extreme weather events," she said. For Peter King, Capacity Support and Advocacy Advisor at ASPBAE, the disconnect between global discourses on emissions and the more pressing priorities of Pacific communities amid a climate emergency is stark.⁸⁷ "They want to know how they can fix their lives now," he explained. "Do they really care about whether it's methane or carbon dioxide going up in the air? Probably not."

This tension between Pacific people's everyday survival and the more protracted work of holding global polluters accountable is not a rejection of climate justice discourse, but a call for its localisation. "Politically, they're behind the curve. And [Pacific NECs] see themselves on a similar boat, going down quickly," King said. "So, they are very supportive of political actions by NGOs."

Such political engagement occurs within stark organisational constraints. The NECs are usually run by just two or three people outside of their executive boards. The burden of daily advocacy work falls primarily on this understaffed and underresourced secretariat. Chronic underfunding continues to limit the reach and visibility of Pacific NECs in higher-level decision-making spaces, such as UN policy events and conferences.

In a region where coalitions rely heavily on donor support to sustain operations, these funding gaps lay bare the limitations inherent in development assistance itself. Peter cautioned particularly against short-term interventions, where assistance often dissipates once a project cycle ends. Certainly, more sustained forms of engagement would enable NECs to access mentorship and resources over the long run. But such

critiques must also be balanced against the reasonably expected value that time-bound interventions can bring, particularly when they are specifically developed to complement rather than supplant existing regional initiatives. Where longstanding mechanisms have struggled to deliver, even modest support can catalyse renewed interest and strategic engagement at the intersection of education and sub-themes like climate justice that have hitherto been underexplored.

This is where new, thoughtfully designed partnerships like the Learning Collaborative, though limited in duration, can be vital and generative. Cortina indeed noted that one of the Learning Collaborative's core contributions could be in enabling new forms of capacity-building relevant to climate justice campaigning, thus laying the groundwork for NECs' future, more expansive work in this area

Such foundational knowledge can help the Pacific NECs proffer a vision for a just transition and rethink how education intersects with deep-rooted issues of dispossession, the erosion of Indigenous lifeways, and corporate extractivism, among other vested interests in the region. For the Pacific peoples and their allies, climate justice may better be understood not only in terms of risk management and adaptation but also in relation to their struggles for equity and self-determination. Education, viewed through a climate justice lens, should then enable them to articulate, on their own terms, what constitutes sustainable development on their own terms.

3.2. Situating Climate Justice in Education: Country-Level Perspectives

This section presents insights from the FGDs with the NEC representatives. The following narrative reports provide a grounded perspective on the status of climate justice advocacy within each NEC's ongoing work and draw attention to locally perceived challenges, opportunities for advocacy, and prospects for a just transition in each country's education sector.

3.2.1. Papua New Guinea

In 2014, in its Second National Communication to the UNFCCC, the Papua New Guinea government identified six climate change impacts as the targets of future adaptation strategies: coastal flooding and sea level rise, inland flooding, increasing threats to public health, landslides, sea surface temperature increases, and food insecurity owing to agricultural losses in a warming climate.⁸⁸ Over a decade later, many of these challenges are still entrenching longstanding forms of vulnerability, especially within the education sector, according to PEAN National Program Coordinator and Executive Director David Kumie and John Tul, a programme officer.

Remarkably, extreme heat is exacting a heavy toll on learning environments. “Students feel odd during the day, and they cannot do a lot of work. There’s a reduction of productivity during the day,” Kumie said. He added that frequent droughts limit water access, affecting sanitation and school attendance. A prolonged drought driven by an El Niño event in 2015–2016, for example, led to severe food shortages,⁸⁹ and experts predict that similar climate shocks are bound to bear down most heavily and for a much longer term on rural households, which comprise over 85 per cent of the total population.⁹⁰

Few crops are drought-resilient, while most (e.g. sweet potato, rice, cassava, sugarcane, and maize) are vulnerable to climate-related hazards, especially surface temperature increases. Kumie also noted shifting climate patterns lately, marked, by belatedly delayed northwest monsoonal rains during the supposedly wet period, for example.⁹¹ These shifts frustrate traditional planting cycles in farming communities, destabilising household food supply and income. By extension, these events prevent children from attending school regularly. Tul remarked on this often invisible link between drought-induced food insecurity and student absenteeism – a trend that PEAN has observed particularly in their engagements with communities in volcanic

island provinces. More generally, unpredictable seasonal patterns have strained the well-being of over 70 per cent of households in Papua New Guinea that rely on subsistence farming.⁹²

Increasing rainfall variability has similarly compounded climate change-induced challenges in the highlands and coastal communities.⁹³ For instance, infrastructure damage is becoming increasingly common in these areas. Landslides in the highlands disrupt access to basic service infrastructure (e.g. water and electricity), while some schools near the coasts are considering relocation due to rising sea levels.⁹⁴ Kumie and Tul stressed the relative lack of school climate action plans and climate disaster preparedness measures for teachers and students.

Roadblocks in Advocating for Climate Justice in Education

Although climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are referenced in national policy, “when it translates down to the community and also to the school level and the provincial government, down to the ward and the local levels, I think it has not been implemented well,” Tul said. Indeed, in 2015, the Papua New Guinea government was the first in the region to pass a Climate Change Bill consistent with its “PNG Vision 2050,” a 40-year development strategy that includes the integration of environmental sustainability and climate change studies into primary, secondary and national high school curricula, among other things. PEAN further noted coordination gaps among government agencies and education stakeholders, such as development partners, that have led to unsystematic response and guidance on climate action.

While climate change is a salient topic in youth and environmental advocacy spaces across the Pacific, education-focused advocacy has not yet intersected meaningfully with climate justice. Although there is high-level discourse among policymakers on climate change, its specific impacts on education are mostly overlooked. PEAN sees

the Learning Collaborative as a possible entry point to begin exploring campaigns around climate justice in education.

For PEAN, alliances with climate justice and Indigenous Peoples' organisations have yet to be established. Kumie emphasised the need for stronger engagement in this area and a collaborative framework to incorporate climate justice into its existing education advocacy work. Additionally, funding constraints and limited technical expertise hamper their ability to scale up their advocacy, particularly in vulnerable rural communities.

Capacity Needs for Strengthening NEC's Baseline on Climate Justice Advocacy

PEAN identified several capacity gaps where targeted support from the Learning Collaborative would be valuable. One key area is research design: PEAN would benefit from technical assistance in designing basic research tools (e.g. drafting appropriate questions and using sound methodologies and terminologies) for climate-related education research rooted in the coalition's current approaches to community participatory action research. Most of PEAN's advocacy work is based on evidence from partners, including local youth and ward councillors and development committees. Tul noted that this approach helps counter a prevailing perception in some communities that solutions to their local problems must come solely from external actors, such as government agencies or large international donors. Instead, by building capacity for grassroots analysis and action, "we're trying to help the people in the community to identify the issues themselves and put it into a report form. [...] We help them to understand issues. And then that's where they can advocate for themselves within the community," Tul added.

Tul clarified that their research activities are neither ambitious nor extensive. They conduct four- or five-day basic research skills training at the community (ward) level,

made possible by PEAN's existing arrangements with provincial governments, "and then we help them to come up with different basic questions regarding the challenges they face in their locality," Tul said. The data gathered could also help ward councillors in community-level strategic planning. He suggested, for example, a short research training module that could help communities refine their data collection efforts and analyses, identify how climate change impacts manifest in local learning environments, and explore community-based mitigation and adaptation strategies further.

"They can do the work at the community level. They have the charisma, and they have the spirit to do the work," Tul said of PEAN's member organisations, including teachers' organisations and primary school stakeholders. "But then, most of the time, they lack support and capacity and also the other opportunities, other documents, other information to help their work."

Synthesising data and insights from community-led research is another challenge, especially on a topic like climate change that PEAN's stakeholders may be unfamiliar with. In policy discussions, PEAN would need "some strategy where that information can be consolidated into something that is catchier [...] so that the key message has to be delivered within a short period of time, so that they can [understand] the data and advocacy," Kumie said. He believes that advocacy messaging should be tailored to different audiences. Policymakers, for instance, are often disinterested and do not respond well to reports. "In some parts of the world, leaders don't really want to stay in the room for one hour, two hours, listening to paragraphs of information," he added.

At the same time, messages intended for the wider public or marginalised communities must be equally engaging and accessible, though communicated differently. "They don't read news anymore. They don't watch television anymore," Tul said, especially of young people in Papua New Guinea. Compared with mainstream

media sources, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube have become crucial channels for wider outreach in Papua New Guinea. Yet many PEAN members lack the digital know-how to create short-form multimedia content for awareness-raising. “People don’t want to read long messages but, maybe, want to watch a 30-second, 40-second ‘soft video’ of that message. If we can do that, that would really help,” Kumie said, acknowledging that there are new technologies and tools online that they may not even be aware of.

Kumie believes the Learning Collaborative can help NECs “break down different levels of information,” targeted to different stakeholders. They need support crafting concise, impactful policy briefs on climate change in education, winnowing key messages from dense technical details, and adapting and simplifying these to community members. Internally, PEAN aspires to conduct a trainer-of-trainers programme of sorts, helping leaders of their member organisations improve their communication strategies while potentially expanding their network along the way. “If we are to build their capacities for climate justice advocacy, then we would need support in that space as well, and then also exploring to find new members and how we can collaborate,” Kumie said, emphasising the need for more inclusive and widespread advocacy in hard-to-reach areas. “Our focus is education — we do not want to deviate but incorporate education into climate justice advocacy.”

Vision of a Just Transition in Education

PEAN was not yet familiar with the Just Transition framework, but for Kumie and Tul, its principles resonated with their ongoing equity-based work. The coalition uses the GAPSED framework, which was developed by South Pacific NECs, to integrate equity dimensions into planning, advocacy, and policy engagement. Through workshops, PEAN has trained CBOs, provincial education officers, school principals and teachers, and deputy administrators on the use of GAPSED. For instance, PEAN adopts the tool to

advocate for inclusive budget and infrastructure planning and programming, such as ensuring that new classroom facilities include provisions for learners with disabilities.

Another example shared by PEAN illustrates how GAPSED functions as a corrective to structural biases in education service delivery. In some provinces, teacher inspectors tend to avoid travelling to schools far from urban centres and instead may just rely on secondhand reports from principals – an unfair practice that GAPSED helps expose and address.

For Kumie, exploring pressure points where the concept of just transition might intersect with GAPSED in education governance, access, and quality offers a promising opportunity to deepen NECs' equity lens. "So, if we incorporate [GAPSED] into just transition, that will be really helpful, so we can train the government officials, like when they're planning for sustainability. [...] And then also with the community organisations that we advocate and engage with. [If] they understand it, they provide the check and balance for this programme at the community level for sustainability," he said.

For PEAN, a just transition in the education sector means ensuring that vulnerable groups, especially those in rural and disadvantaged communities, are not left behind in the shift toward climate-adaptive education systems. Kumie sees PEAN's role in this transition as multi-scalar: advocating and lobbying the government for a deeper climate focus in education at the community, provincial, and national levels. "Once we get the communities to advocate, then we raise their voices, and that's when they get the attention of the politicians. Because [...] they are the ones who decide where the money goes. When the community makes a lot of noise, then probably they would look into it," Kumie said.

There is still much to do to foreground climate justice in the education sector. For one thing, teachers and school administrators must be trained to identify and respond to climate hazards, Kumie said. Tul agreed, arguing further that there needs to be a more

explicit, specialised CCE curriculum across all levels. While environmental topics like climate change are currently nominally embedded in science subjects and guided by regional frameworks such as PacREF, PEAN noted that a dedicated climate education curriculum should equip students not only with knowledge of environmental processes but also with the skills and values needed for effective climate action, especially in anticipation of future large-scale disruptions.

Tul pointed to the pandemic as a harrowing but instructive experience for the education sector. “I think COVID-19 just taught a lot of people a lot of lessons, especially the schools, because of lockdowns and the children not going to schools and the teachers looking for ways to make sure that, even in the days of disasters and emergency, students continue to learn,” he said. He feared that the scale of the pandemic’s impact may be comparable to that of future climate change-induced hazards. PEAN hopes that, with appropriate support, the NEC can advocate for all schools to have mandatory climate change mitigation plans and urge policymakers to design programmes to strengthen and showcase schools’ readiness for climate emergencies.

3.2.2. Samoa

Some projections indicate a decline in the overall frequency of cyclones originating from the western North Pacific basin by the end of the century. Yet these storms may be far more severe, with greater rainfall intensity and stronger winds.⁹⁵ These changes are already being felt acutely in Samoa’s low-lying areas, such as Apia, the nation’s capital, where flooding has become a recurring crisis. Inundated drainage systems, infrastructure damage, and losses have plagued the city for years,⁹⁶ with the government estimating approximately USD 25 million in flood-related damages from the December 2020 floods alone. More recent large-scale floods, such as in June 2023, devastated parts of Savai’i, the country’s largest and highest island, damaging homes,

roads, and power lines.⁹⁷ These climate disasters inevitably leave more than just physical destruction in their wake.

“Because of the strong winds, there were falling trees and things flying around, so schools had to be closed,” SEN National Coordinator Joy Leaupepetele said. “So, that was a learning loss for the students, and it also pushed back the calendar. The impact goes to the teachers because, now, they have to stretch time to try to finish their lessons.” She added that many such disruptions have caught teachers unawares, relatively unprepared and overburdened in post-crisis scenarios. For students, these challenges evince the prevailing issues of technological and geographic access. “They’re not able to access online learning to continue their learning,” she said, “or those who don’t have any facilities at home that can cater to them to continue their learning due to their marginalisation by location, economic status.”

Leitu Tevaga, SEN’s programme officer, pointed out the additional delays in education delivery due to damaged school infrastructure that must be repaired or renovated using already strained budgets. Such destruction brings memories of past catastrophes to the fore, not necessarily owing to the same physical causes but because of the shared sense of recurring loss. One event that remains especially vivid in the national psyche is the 2009 Samoa Islands tsunami, which engulfed the country’s shores in 22-meter waves and caused deaths and widespread devastation. “It was really tragic, the impact of that, not only on the families, their homes, livelihoods, their incomes, their businesses, the loss of life, [but also] the loss of learning because students couldn’t attend schools,” Leaupepetele said.

But, while some government agencies, such as the Disaster Management Office within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, are actively engaging with climate change issues, the education sector unfortunately lags behind. Leaupepetele urged policymakers and education advocates to rethink how teachers and students can be

supported in a future where disruption is no longer the exception but the norm – “to think of strategies and solutions on how to move forward because we can’t reverse it, but we can always adapt to it and try to minimise the impacts and see how we can live in this world.”

Roadblocks in Advocating for Climate Justice in Education

In October 2024, Samoa hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), the first time a Pacific Island nation had done so.⁹⁸ Leaupepetele recalled that talks on climate change had featured prominently at the summit, culminating with a call to restore and protect ecosystems in warming oceans and with new pledges to the Pacific Resilience Facility, a grant scheme for community-led disaster readiness projects.⁹⁹ She hoped the discussions had spurred greater political will within Samoa to prioritise climate action. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the government itself has had a conversation about putting climate change at the forefront and being one of their focus,” she said, but added that “they’re going about it slowly, and it’s not moving fast enough.”

Climate change is indeed “a dot in the conversation,” according to Leaupepetele: it is recognised and occasionally referenced but does not precede other items in the national education agenda. “But we’re heading there,” she continued, “to where they’re going to try to implement some kind of climate change education in the curriculum. [...] It’s getting there, but everything in Samoa takes time. It’s slow.” She said policy implementation is fairly fragmented, and policy design tends to be rigid. Advocacy, then, must push for an institutional shift in how decision-makers make room for climate adaptation within their already established agenda and budget. “It’s just trying to win them over,” she explained, “for them to see that this is one of the things that we should go look at and where the Ministry should have a focus on and where the Ministry should implement change in the classrooms and their education programmes.”

Leaupetetele could see how the influence of effective CCE might ripple outward from classrooms into homes, especially in the villages where knowledge gaps are still wide. “Because, honestly, our community lacks awareness and understanding of what climate change is [...] And because I’m also from the rural areas, I can personally attest to why that kind of understanding and awareness is lacking in our communities.” She pointed to the limited reach of formal education and public information campaigns, observing that climate change, though widely acknowledged, may still feel abstract for many.

Despite these challenges, SEN is well-positioned to drive grassroots momentum for an education-centred climate justice campaign if it moves in that direction. It undertakes research on gender equality and inclusion in education with women’s committees and other CBOs. It also holds a seat in Samoa’s Education Sector Advisory Committee, which meets quarterly to review policy reports and proposals. This institutional presence allows SEN to voice rural communities’ concerns with gaps within formal education policymaking spaces.

Capacity Needs for Strengthening NEC’s Baseline on Climate Justice Advocacy

SEN welcomes the opportunity to sharpen its understanding of climate justice, particularly concerning CCE. Leaupetetele believes that NECs should adopt a critical lens to inform their advocacy: apart from technical facts, there should be “a deep dive into what climate change is and the impacts and causes and [what happens] if we don’t address this issue and really come up with some strong strategies and strong messages to put across to the government and also the policymakers, to really pull them in and wake them up and say ‘Hey, you know, these people are right — we need to do something about this.’”

The coalition's current projects centre on gender equality and inclusive education. Leaupepetele noted that climate advocacy would be a natural extension, with cross-cutting relevance to their member organisations, including farmers' cooperatives and the Samoa Conservation Society. For her, the diverse membership of SEN enables it to champion causes that resonate not only with policymakers but also with communities that may not initially consider themselves stakeholders in education. "Because we believe even if you're a climate change-focused organisation, it's still education that other people need to know about. [...] Because it doesn't matter if you're in a different field. If your organisation has a different focus, it's all education to us."

Leaupepetele hopes that, through the Learning Collaborative, SEN can mount awareness-raising campaigns on climate justice by developing resonant messages to reach the wider public. The key is "to engage them after we tell our stories: how can we bring them on board, how can we make them realise that they are part of the solution?" The coalition already uses social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok for information dissemination but hopes to acquire new skills for effective digital strategising and storytelling. Beyond communications, SEN is eager to strengthen its presence in advocacy and policy arenas, particularly on climate education and financing issues, and initiate partnerships with local and external networks. Community workshops and policy forums remain vital spaces for this kind of work, and Leaupepetele sees the Learning Collaborative as a platform for deepening SEN's engagement.

Leaupepetele identified several other areas where targeted capacity-building support from the Learning Collaborative would be especially valuable. These include: (i) strategies for integrating CCE into curricula using learner-centred pedagogies; (ii) discussions on the differential impacts of the climate crisis on marginalised groups and how they intersect with larger issues of social justice, environmental racism, and equity-based policymaking; (iii) support for promoting climate literacy and mental

health awareness, particularly in post-disaster contexts; and (iv) opportunities to explore innovative funding models and adaptive approaches to building resilience in education. Lastly, Leaupepetele looks forward to an interactive workshop format – “a lot of sharing, a lot of talking, and hands-on practicals” – to foster skills development and solidarity among the NECs.

Vision of a Just Transition in Education

Leaupepetel said candidly that no systems exist in Samoa to support a just transition. Though some efforts may be underway, she clarified, they have not yet been operationalised in ways that benefit schools and communities. In her view, a just transition must begin with education: “A just transition in Samoa should be focused on integrating climate change education and sustainability into the education system while also ensuring that the necessary support and resources are provided to the students, teachers, and other education institutions.”

To realise this vision, Leaupepetele highlighted the need to invest in “building up climate-literate educators – people who really know what climate change is, its causes and impacts and long-term effects, and how to manage the solutions.” For SEN, a just transition in education also requires complementary efforts outside the classroom: upgrading school infrastructure to withstand climate impacts, mainstreaming Indigenous knowledge systems, expanding access to education for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and strengthening global cooperation among education partners to co-produce transformative solutions to longstanding education problems compounded by climate change.

However, according to SEN, the Samoan public is generally uninformed about the pressing issues concerning education. The coalition is working to bridge this gap by raising community-level awareness and continually pushing for government

accountability to ensure these commitments are not simply left “sitting on a shelf collecting dust.” “That will be our role,” Leaupepetele said, “to advocate for the proper implementation of these kinds of policies as part of a just transition for the Samoa education system.” This watchdog function distinguishes SEN’s approach: not only monitoring whether state-led decisions are being enacted but also ascertaining their mileage and impact. “It’s one thing to advocate for climate change policies in education,” she said. “It’s another to take it out to the whole of Samoa; otherwise, it would be pointless.”

3.2.3. Solomon Islands

The impacts of climate change have become a daily lived experience in the Solomon Islands, “happening almost every day,” according to COESI National Coordinator Jack Kalisto. Many communities lie within 1.5 kilometres of the coastline, some on low-lying atolls that are acutely exposed to sea levels rising at more than twice the global average, threatening agriculture, water systems, and infrastructure.¹⁰⁰ For those living in the more remote islands, climate change is not so much an impending existential threat as a clear, present danger. “It’s always in the consciousness of the people,” Kalisto said, “and therefore there is no sense of security. There is no sort of plan to follow or help them if there is a disaster happening.”

The knock-on effects on the education sector are already visible. Heavy rains and storm surges frequently cause school closures and lead to absenteeism. “The children, they don’t come to school because of bad weather, so they miss classes,” Kalisto said. “And even the teachers themselves because of these impacts of climate change.” These disruptions erode the continuity of learning, yet the full extent of their cumulative impact on student performance is difficult to assess. Geographic isolation thwarts efforts to track the delivery of education goals, with many schools in disaster-prone

areas only reachable by boat. “It really changes a lot of plans because the climate is unpredictable,” Kalisto added. “So, you really just kind of have to have a flexi-plan.”

Food insecurity, a growing concern due to environmental degradation,¹⁰¹ has likewise emerged as a key issue. Some children in rural communities struggle with malnutrition as climate impacts reduce the viability of traditional food systems amid already scarce resources. These cascading effects make CCE an urgent issue to COESI, both as a policy priority and as a matter of justice, even though it has not been part of the coalition’s advocacy agenda. “Our education system has to orient and situate itself in terms of addressing climate change in education,” Kalisto said, “because it is a fact, and it is happening within our country now.”

Roadblocks in Advocating for Climate Justice in Education

Kalisto acknowledged government efforts to tackle climate change, particularly through the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology. However, COESI is wary of how effectively these policies translate on the ground. “Because there’s a lot of things that still need to be done there, and they are very important issues that the government should focus on,” he said, citing, for example, the relocation plans for atoll-dwelling populations that have been stalled.

The climate justice agenda in the education sector is no exception: schools remain ill-equipped to withstand climate change impacts, even as education rights advocates have begun to flag this gap. “Sometimes they don’t invite us,” Kalisto said of education officials. “They don’t consult us, and yet they go ahead and develop policies.” He noted that the relative exclusion of civil society from decision-making contributes to a disconnect from high-level climate adaptation strategies. COESI raised these concerns at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, where it participated in the 2024 VNR sessions as part of the Major Groups and Other

Stakeholders. Kalisto pointed out that while the government has outlined a roadmap for accessing climate finance, practical support for vulnerable communities remains limited.

“In the education sector, there are some resources given out on climate change,” Kalisto explained, “but again we still feel like there’s still a lot more things to do in terms of facilities, in terms of training for the teachers. Because a lot of the teachers, they really don’t know how to address climate change in education.” Without opportunities for professional development, educators are left without the tools or language to even begin the climate conversation, let alone guide students to live out its lessons beyond the classroom. CCE should be “something the children learn while they are small,” he continued, “and they can put that into practice when they go back to their homes when they leave school.”

Capacity Needs for Strengthening NEC’s Baseline on Climate Justice Advocacy

So far, all of COESI’s projects have focused on issues they have examined through grassroots engagement, community-based research, and analyses of national policy gaps. Kalisto cited some areas the coalition has explored, including youth employment opportunities, using vernacular language in early childhood education, and alternative education delivery during emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, CCE or climate justice has not yet figured notably in COESI’s programming. Integrating it into its agenda will require capacity-building and preliminary investigation.

The coalition is active in policy forums and donor consultations but has not yet actively spoken out on climate justice due to limited technical know-how. For Kalisto, any future engagement in such advocacy must first be grounded in deepened knowledge of the subject. “If we have a good understanding of climate change education, that can build our confidence,” he said. “Because if we talk about something we don’t really have a

good understanding of, then we might not be able to influence people.” Such knowledge, he added, must ultimately trickle down to COESI’s network of CBOs: “What are the skills and knowledge that’s out there to help give them the courage [...] to really advocate for climate change education to schools, to communities, and overall to the government, to really be able to do something instead of just relying on whatever is already there in the policy.”

COESI needs guidance to “refocus our understanding of climate change in education” and identify clear entry points for advocacy. “We know the [climate change] impact is happening. But, in terms of putting it into proposals, probably we can do it, but probably it won’t be good, [unless] we have the expertise of people who know a lot about climate change,” Kalisto said. As he reiterated, their challenge lies not in mobilising stakeholders but in translating climate concerns into coherent ideas for a project down the line. “We’ve been working with communities for a long time now, so we have that for the expertise and experience there, but it’s just getting the funds for us [...] this is where we really need the support.”

Kalisto harked back to food security as a compelling theme for future advocacy, given its direct links to both climate change and education outcomes. He would also like to learn more about this topic in the Learning Collaborative’s workshop. In boarding schools in the Solomon Islands, he said, students are often fed cheap, processed foods that contribute to poor nutrition and, in turn, impair their ability to focus and perform well. Having worked with a local garden organisation, he recommends reframing agricultural production, as taught and practised in schools, to focus on sustainable farming and agroecology. “Because all these kids, they will go back to the village. And when they get the skills, they have the knowledge to start to address the impacts of climate change in terms of food security,” Kalisto said, arguing that, in a warming world, rural communities should be supported in growing food varieties that can tolerate droughts, storms, and salinity.

With around 74 per cent of the population living in rural areas as of 2023, COESI must contend with logistical constraints when engaging communities across the Solomon Islands' many dispersed islands. These barriers make it difficult to scale up or pilot climate justice initiatives beyond more accessible urban areas. For Kalisto, the Learning Collaborative offers an opportunity to help close these capacity gaps by fostering cross-coalition learning, as other South Pacific NECs similarly face this challenge of working across archipelagic geographies. "We have to really readjust our way of thinking to have a good picture of climate change," he said, "by learning from others, by knowing what to do, and also by getting advice from people who know about climate change."

Vision of a Just Transition in Education

The just transition framework was new to COESI, but once explained, Kalisto believed it aligned with their values and concerns around equity in the education sector. It resonated strongly with the coalition's advocacy emphasis on expanding access to education. But, while girls' education in the Solomon Islands has improved, Kalisto shared that gender disparities persist, as women remain underrepresented in national leadership roles, overburdened in informal labour, and subject to gender-based violence. From COESI's perspective, a just transition should confront these socially entrenched biases that limit whose voices and interests are reflected in the country's climate adaptation decisions.

Meanwhile, the education sector must pivot toward helping students "build resilient communities to live in during this time of climate change impacts," Kalisto said. For COESI, CCE should not just dwell on academics; rather, it must also serve as a platform for accountability and informed civic engagement. Kalisto believes it should be woven into the country's wider development agenda: "What will the government do in terms of addressing other climate change issues, in terms of relocation, in terms of food

security, in terms of distance learning, in terms of carbon credit, and in terms of conservation, in terms of other things in our country that are also [vulnerable to] the impacts of climate change?”

3.2.4. Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, disasters strike with such frequency and intensity that annual damages and losses are estimated at 6 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product.¹⁰² Climate change-driven impacts such as sea level rise and increased rainfall intensity are projected to interact with other known hazards, including tropical cyclones, landslides, and floods. These are causing widespread displacement, infrastructure damage, and school closures post-disaster, said KoBLE National Coordinator Narand Beerbul. They pose major logistical and structural challenges for teaching and learning, and the compounded effect of these disruptions undercuts Vanuatu’s progress in achieving SDG 4.

For the education sector, the gap between impact and intervention, especially when reliant on external funding, means that students are left learning in makeshift environments for far too long. For example, “after a cyclone strikes, it takes so many weeks or months to assess. And then that assessment will go to the donors, and donors will take maybe three, four years before we get the money,” Beerbul said. “By that time, the children are [still] schooling in tents.”

Bottlenecks in post-disaster needs assessment and slow aid disbursements protract the delays already caused by fragmented and unequal resource distribution. “When there’s a disaster, everyone walks their own way. There’s no coordination, and that’s the challenge,” Beerbul said. Without a unified response, aid efforts are often duplicated, while other areas are overlooked entirely. Remote schools and communities, in particular, struggle to access timely support. Beerbul highlighted the need for a more

coordinated, equity-driven response system across NGOs and government bodies to ensure that no one is left behind in the wake of climate disasters.

Among the cascading effects of climate-induced disasters, food insecurity has emerged as a pressing concern.¹⁰³ Damage to agriculture directly impacts student nutrition and concentration, while the lack of adequate sanitation during emergencies disproportionately affects women, girls, and persons with disabilities. Against this backdrop, KoBLE sees climate justice in education as more than just a sectoral issue: it is a social imperative.

Roadblocks in Advocating for Climate Justice in Education

While the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology and Geo-Hazards, Energy, Environment and National Disaster Management leads national-level climate initiatives, several key adaptation strategies in the education sector are underway. For example, the Vanuatu Primary Schools Infrastructure Guidelines and the Primary School Asset Management Plan have been developed to review shortfalls between existing education infrastructure assets and the optimal requirements based on school and class sizes and resistance to cyclones, among other considerations. KoBLE was involved in developing and reviewing these baseline assessment documents. It has also been part of consultations for future national curriculum reforms, which include plans to embed CCE at all levels.

KoBLE indeed values cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), with which the coalition, in 2023, renewed a memorandum of understanding that formalises its standing as a focal point for CSO representation in national education policy and budget development processes. The coalition joins the Local Education Governance meetings, where education CSOs and teachers' associations can raise issues of equity and accountability in policy. For example, KoBLE was instrumental in

promoting the progressive implementation of the Vanuatu Inclusive Education Policy through this venue.

Despite these engagements, systemic challenges persist and constrain policymakers' sustained collaboration with civil society. For example, political instability — several Ministers of Education in just the past two years — hampers policy continuity and may lead to inconsistencies in implementation, Beerbul said. "If the new minister comes, he [might] prioritise his own constituency. So, maybe some schools are built in his constituency, things like that. There's not enough fairness," he added. "They lack concentration. They lack the vision on some priorities that have to do with education."

Without support, the NEC might struggle to take climate education forward as an advocacy track amid decision-makers' shifting priorities. "Another challenge, I can say, is political will," Beerbul said. "Sometimes, when you want to do something, the politicians have their own agenda. They don't take our priorities as a priority for them, so it's a bit hard sometimes to convince the Ministry of Education to do something."

Still, Beerbul maintains "a very positive outlook that climate change education will bring change and change the mindset of politicians." He continues bringing up the need for climate action in other venues as well, such as through the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO), the umbrella organisation for all Vanuatu-based nonprofits, within which Beerbul holds the vice-chair role.

Capacity Needs for Strengthening NEC's Baseline on Climate Justice Advocacy

Beerbul would like to elevate CCE to one of KoBLE's core advocacy priorities, recognising its intersection with the coalition's current focus on gender and inclusion in education. CCE complements KoBLE's mission to empower disadvantaged groups with lifelong learning opportunities. "You should have climate education, not only at school but also

in the communities,” he said. “Then people could have better knowledge [of] how to prepare and respond and recover from disasters — and they become more resilient.”

However, the coalition has yet to envision what CCE might look like in practice. Beerbul acknowledged that “climate education is very broad” and stressed the need for clear, context-specific guidance to help shape KoBLE’s CCE advocacy. In particular, KoBLE is seeking support to understand better how the coalition could lobby for the meaningful integration of CCE across all subjects in Vanuatu’s national education system. Beerbul noted, for example, that CCE curricula must be tailored to different educational levels, from primary to secondary, with age-appropriate content and developmentally aligned learning outcomes.

Beyond access to technical resources, the Learning Collaborative can introduce NECs like KoBLE to education unions and other actors that have long campaigned for CCE and have already grappled deeply with its practical dimensions, which Beerbul admitted KoBLE has yet to explore, from defining core competencies to addressing implementation challenges in diverse classroom contexts. An education unionist’s perspective on advocating for curriculum review and revision, teacher training on transformative pedagogical approaches, and so on offers practical insights that can help NECs build their CCE strategies from the ground up.

Beerbul expressed a strong interest in learning from others’ experiences. For the Learning Collaborative in-person workshop, he recommended a peer learning approach involving cross-country sharing of ongoing climate justice advocacy efforts in the South Pacific or, in the case of most NECs, honest reflections on how they are beginning to navigate this space. All the NECs have, one way or another, been capacitated on the administrative aspects of their work, such as financial management, programme monitoring and evaluation, and report writing. A climate justice-specific workshop will be a first for them, Beerbul said, so there is an opportunity

to unify on a new common cause with other NECs in the sub-region. “We have similar climate issues, and we can learn from each other – how they are tackling, how they are addressing those challenges in their country, in the education sector,” he added.

Beerbul reiterated the need for a robust evidence base developed independently of government agencies to participate productively in such knowledge exchanges and effectively advocate within national education policy spaces. “We don’t get the reliable data in Vanuatu. Sometimes, the data is not relevant. It’s not verified. It’s not validated,” he said, lamenting the challenges in monitoring education policy outcomes under such data-poor conditions. For its part, KoBLE’s evidence-based outputs have been mostly limited to “simple spotlight reports” from the main island that the coalition then presents to the Ministry of Education annually. “We only have three staff [members], and definitely we need some skills in data research so that we can come up with proper reliable data. And from that data, we can influence policy,” Beerbul said. “We can tell the Ministry, ‘See? This is our data. This thing should happen,’ you know.”

Vision of a Just Transition in Education

Beerbul envisions a just transition in terms of expanded access to quality education, from early childhood to at least Year 13 (secondary education), with every student supported to pursue higher and further education or TVET pathways for those not pursuing academic tracks. At each level, CCE should enable students to make informed climate-conscious choices that safeguard their individual and community well-being in the face of heightened climate risks. “By the time they grow and become adults, climate education should be part of their lives — preparedness, response, and recovery,” he said.

To make CCE genuinely effective and promote educational continuity under climate stress, mandatory universal education is a key policy demand for KoBLE. Over the years,

Beerbul observed that the youth are becoming disillusioned with schooling, discouraged by peer pressure, economic hardship, and disengaging curricula. They tend to drop out, “until only the elite, only a small part, goes to the university, and that’s really a challenge for us,” Beerbul said. More and more young men pursue better pay abroad, like in Australia and New Zealand.¹⁰⁴ Until they are old enough to join labour mobility programmes, “they drop out of primary or secondary school, and they just roam around the streets doing nothing and creating so many juvenile problems,” Beerbul said. He touched on the gendered dimensions of this growing trend: “That’s another issue in Vanuatu: the working class is leaving. That’s why the boys are not interested in education, and the girls stay. Because, according to the culture here, the girls should stay back at home and things like that.”

However, many women and girls, often tasked with caregiving duties, face limited economic opportunities and are likely to engage in low-paying work, even after university graduation. During disasters, these structural inequalities become even more pronounced. Beerbul noted that women and girls face mobility constraints, especially when evacuation is required. In this context, KoBLE sees CCE not only as a tool for risk awareness but also as a means to shift harmful gender norms and help young women assert their agency in navigating crises.

These social inequalities also shape who gets to deliver education and how well-equipped they are to do so. “We should provide them [with] proper resources, the proper training regarding climate education,” Beerbul said of teachers, adding that many of them in Vanuatu unfortunately lack professional qualifications or are otherwise under-trained. Still, he said, “We will not trust anybody else to teach our children except the teachers.”

Moving forward, progress on mainstreaming CCE will ultimately require political commitment. “There should be this will from the government, too, to encourage

teachers and communities to concentrate on climate education,” Beerbul said. He also called for deeper sub-regional collaboration through a “consortium”-like platform for Pacific NECs. “Collectively, we are stronger to advocate in terms of climate education. Advocacy can become more effective and stronger if these four countries come together,” he noted.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Synthesis of Findings

The baseline assessment revealed critical gaps in the knowledge and capacity of Pacific NECs on climate justice that, if unaddressed, could undermine their ability to engage meaningfully in climate–education policy and advocacy. NEC leaders themselves openly acknowledged these deficits and the need for more structured support in translating their expressed interest in exploring climate justice into effective modes of engagement. There was a gap in their understanding of fundamental climate policy precepts and frameworks that are standard in international discourse. They tended to conflate terms and concepts like “just transition” with more generic notions of transformation or sustainability. Others attributed, rather indiscriminately, all their countries’ recent experiences with natural hazards to climate change. These misconceptions do not invalidate the NEC representatives’ early efforts to engage in climate discussions but simply underscore the lack of guided access to technical grounding, political education, and relevant knowledge products at their disposal. These gaps currently limit their ability to speak authoritatively on climate–related education advocacy and navigate climate policy arenas where they could otherwise articulate their local concerns.

These internal limitations have external consequences, particularly when it comes to how Pacific stories are represented – or left out – in ongoing and future global climate justice discourse. After all, Pacific Island communities are bound to be invoked in these conversations – frequently by actors outside the region – but without targeted capacity–building intervention, the voices of Pacific NECs themselves risk remaining marginal or unheard. At a time when escalating climate threats bear down on their

countries, NECs must be equipped to speak for themselves, shape narratives, and set the agenda. The Learning Collaborative must, therefore, prioritise addressing foundational capacity needs if the coalitions are to integrate climate justice into their programmes and engage credibly across different levels of climate–education policymaking.

The insights shared across the four NECs offer valuable starting points for this process. Specific thematic takeaways from the narrative reports are summarised in Tables 3–5. Three major categories are explored: (i) roadblocks in advocating for climate justice in education; (ii) capacity needs for strengthening NECs’ climate justice advocacy; and (iii) coalition perspectives on what a just transition means in the education sector.

Roadblocks in Policy and Advocacy. All four NECs identified a disconnect between national policy frameworks and local-level implementation of climate policies, particularly in rural and remote areas. This gap is exacerbated by poor inter-agency coordination, logistical challenges due to geography, and slow, fragmented policy processes, despite decision-makers recognising the urgency of climate issues. A common challenge is the relative marginalisation of education concerns within other climate action initiatives. The NECs also reported data limitations that hamper evidence-based advocacy, with some emphasising unreliable or unavailable data. School and teacher preparedness emerged as another cross-cutting issue as disruptions due to or in the wake of climate disasters become increasingly frequent. These challenges manifest in the general lack of contingency plans for educational continuity, the need for climate-proofing or infrastructural upgrades in schools, and rural–urban divides in climate adaptation measures and access to virtual or distance learning and other alternative modes of education content delivery.

Table 3. Roadblocks identified by the National Education Coalition (NECs) in advocating for climate justice in the Pacific education sector

NEC (Country)	Roadblocks in Policy and Advocacy
PEAN (Papua New Guinea)	- National: Climate policies present but weakly implemented at the local level. - National: Poor inter-agency coordination and low visibility of climate adaptation programmes in education. - Organisational: Gaps in digital literacy for advocacy, with limited outreach. - Organisational: Limited technical expertise and funding.
SEN (Samoa)	- National: Climate change acknowledged but not prioritised in education planning. - National: Fragmented, tentative, and slow implementation of climate adaptation plans. - National: Limited climate awareness in rural areas due to information and education gaps. - National: Teacher and student unpreparedness for disaster-related disruptions affecting learning continuity. - National: Climate advocacy peripheral to national education discourse.
COESI (Solomon Islands)	- National: Policy design–implementation disconnect, especially in remote schools. - National: Limited civil society consultation in education policymaking. - National: Logistical barriers owing to archipelagic geography. - National: Inadequate teacher training on climate education. - National: Poor translation of climate finance and relocation policies into practical support.
KoBLE (Vanuatu)	- National: Frequent climate disasters disrupting education infrastructure and SDG 4 progress. - National: Aid bottlenecks delaying school post-disaster rebuilding efforts. - National: Coordination gaps causing duplicated or neglected interventions.

NEC	
(Country)	Roadblocks in Policy and Advocacy
	• National: Political instability undermining policy continuity and state–civil society partnerships. • National: Inconsistent ministerial priorities hampering climate education mainstreaming. • Organisational: Inadequate data available for evidence-based advocacy.

Capacity Needs. Across all NECs, deeper technical grounding in climate science, policy, CCE and climate justice is lacking. This common thread appears, for instance, in COESI’s acknowledgement that limited expertise hampers their ability to speak authoritatively on climate issues, echoed by PEAN’s request for support in designing community-based research on climate–education connections. The coalitions share an interest in developing effective advocacy messaging strategies for policymakers and their constituencies. Digital storytelling and multimedia advocacy skills are a priority across all NECs. The NECs also approach capacity-building, through the Learning Collaborative workshop and subsequent activities, as a potential avenue for peer learning and interactive, skills-based training. Some NECs would like to learn more about examining education issues through a climate justice lens, using participatory community-based approaches to generate independent evidence for advocacy and policy engagement or as the basis for future project proposals. The NECs cite different possible entry points for climate justice work: through the GAPSED framework, through youth and gender equity initiatives, through campaigns at the climate–education–food security nexus, and through a strengthened focus on CCE curricular integration across all education levels.

Table 4. Capacity needs identified by the National Education Coalition (NECs) in advocating for climate justice and/or climate change education (CCE) in the Pacific education sector

NEC	
(Country)	Capacity Needs
PEAN (Papua New Guinea)	• Support for community-based, participatory climate education research. • Guidance on crafting accessible messaging for policymakers and communities. • Training in multimedia advocacy and digital storytelling. • Development of short research modules with a “trainer-of-trainers” approach.
SEN (Samoa)	• Deeper understanding of climate justice integration into education advocacy. • Skills for strategic advocacy messaging and policy engagement. • Capacity for effective social media and storytelling for CCE advocacy. • Training in learner-centred CCE integration and post-disaster support (e.g. links between mental health and climate change). • Interactive, skills-based workshops for NEC collaboration and solidarity.
COESI (Solomon Islands)	• Technical grounding in CCE for policy engagement and advocacy. • Support identifying advocacy entry points and developing fundable project concepts. • Guidance incorporating CCE into community-based organisations (CBOs) work and education rights campaigns. • Knowledge-sharing on food security and sustainable school-based agriculture. • Strengthened peer learning with NECs facing similar geographic challenges in research and advocacy.
KoBLE (Vanuatu)	• Practical guidance on examples of CCE implementation across curricula with age-appropriate materials. • Capacity-building for climate advocacy messaging tailored to diverse audiences. • Peer-learning opportunities with other NECs for context-specific climate advocacy approaches. • Support in data collection and basic research methods for evidence-based climate-education policy engagement.

NEC	
(Country)	Capacity Needs
	Connections with education unions, pedagogy specialists, and other CCE experts.

Just Transition Priorities. The four NECs share a foundational vision that a just transition in education must ensure that marginalised communities are not left behind in the shift toward climate-responsive systems. Their shared priorities include foregrounding equity concerns within the education sector and supporting teachers, through upskilling, as frontline agents in delivering CCE. While the NECs slightly differ in how they conceptualise their roles in a just transition, each articulated complementary advocacy: PEAN underlines multi-scalar lobbying from community to national levels; SEN envisions itself as a watchdog ensuring policy commitments are fulfilled; COESI focuses on empowering women and youth to fortify community resilience; and KoBLE advances a vision of sustainable, sub-regional collaboration at the climate–education intersection. All the NECs regard CCE as a key pathway for enabling a just transition: as transformative rather than merely informational, linking classroom learning with accountability and civic action.

Table 5. Just transition priorities identified by the National Education Coalition (NECs) in advocating for climate justice in the Pacific education sector

NEC	
(Country)	Just Transition Priorities
PEAN	Integrating GAPSED framework into just transition discourse.
(Papua New Guinea)	- Promoting inclusive, climate-responsive education infrastructure and policy. - Advocating for explicit CCE curricula and school-level emergency preparedness. - Facilitating multi-scalar advocacy from community to national levels.

NEC	
(Country)	Just Transition Priorities
SEN (Samoa)	- Integrating climate justice and education for sustainability into curricula. - Developing climate-literate educators with civic action and equity focus. - Improving education infrastructure, incorporating Indigenous knowledge into CCE, and expanding access for marginalised learners. - Monitoring transparency and accountability in climate-education policy implementation at the community level.
COESI (Solomon Islands)	- Addressing gender disparities in education and climate adaptation planning. - Building student capacity for community resilience and future-oriented decision-making. - Expanding CCE beyond academics to civic engagement and policy awareness. - Ensuring inclusion of marginalised rural and atoll communities in climate action. - Connecting education with national priorities, such as relocation, food security, and distance learning.
KoBLE (Vanuatu)	- Ensuring universal access to quality education with embedded CCE at all levels. - Integrating climate impact preparedness, response, and recovery into students' everyday knowledge and practices. - Formulating retention strategies to address student disillusionment and dropout, especially among young men seeking overseas work. - Leveraging CCE to challenge gender norms and enhance women's mobility during disasters. - Coordinating sub-regional NEC advocacy on climate education.

4.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the reflections and suggestions shared by NEC representatives during the climate justice baseline consultations. While some interventions are feasible within the current project timeline, others require longer-term planning and investment. The recommendations are therefore presented

in two categories: (1) short-term interventions from the Learning Collaborative and (2) long-term directions, with the proposed groundwork that can be laid in the next phase.

4.2.1. Short-Term Interventions from the Learning Collaborative

Deepen NECs’ understanding of climate justice and just transition through contextualised learning. Several coalitions noted their conceptual unfamiliarity with various tools and frameworks for analysis in climate justice advocacy, such as just transition. The workshop and follow-up activities, such as webinars, can introduce these concepts and anchor them in the lived realities of education inequities in the Pacific.

Include thematic discussion sessions on issues NECs identified as resonant entry points into climate justice. Topics such as youth empowerment, food security, well-being in post-disaster contexts, rural and Indigenous knowledge, and gendered vulnerabilities were identified by NECs as some of the pressing concerns in their education contexts. Including some of these in the workshop agenda can spark cross-country dialogue and help NECs begin articulating climate justice priorities based on their experiences. These themes at the climate–education intersection may also serve as the foundation for NECs to build future advocacy initiatives reflecting their positionality and shaped by their constituencies’ needs.

Develop a shared resource hub on climate education and justice. Several NECs mentioned limited access to reliable information and data, technical materials, and advocacy tools and tips. A central repository of curated resources (e.g. sample climate education curricula, toolkits on gender and inclusion, and climate communication strategies) could help coalitions build internal knowledge and capacity at their own pace.

Facilitate skills training on inclusive and community-based research for climate advocacy. The Learning Collaborative can equip NECs to design their own tools and training and help them strengthen their capacity to implement simple, participatory research activities, including drafting guide questions, collecting local data as evidence base, and translating findings into advocacy. The outputs need not be ambitious or effortful to produce. An example, as suggested by one of the NECs, could be co-developing digests like spotlight reports on where CCE stands in their countries or a short research training module tailored to rural and school-based contexts.

Provide support for effective climate communication strategies. NECs expressed interest in formulating impactful advocacy messages and engaging new audiences, especially youth. The project can offer training on advocacy messaging across different formats (e.g. storytelling, short-form videos, and policy briefs) tailored to various audiences (e.g. policymakers and communities).

Organise peer-learning exchange opportunities to share strategies across NECs. Many coalitions are yet to start on climate justice advocacy. Structured peer-sharing sessions during the workshop and virtual exchanges afterwards can provide space to learn from one another's challenges, tools, and best practices in their other areas of work that can be imported into climate advocacy. These opportunities could encourage lateral learning and mutual support, as well as help them recognise shared priorities for cooperation.

Support NECs in mapping entry points for integrating CCE into national education systems and climate justice into current NEC work. While discussions on curriculum revision processes have begun in some Pacific countries, other NECs are seeking clarity on where to start. A collective mapping exercise, including timelines and institutional allies, could help each NEC chart a feasible path forward. For example, NECs like SEN and KoBLE noted gaps in education and climate adaptation policies that can be

explored as opportunities for engagement. Just as crucially, this mapping exercise could support NECs in identifying how climate justice aligns with their own ongoing programmes, partnerships, and advocacy platforms, helping to ground CCE in their existing strengths, areas of influence, and knowledge of the leverage points in their countries' civil society.

4.2.2. Long-Term Directions for NECs' Climate Justice Advocacy

Embed climate justice within existing education advocacy and programmatic work.

Launching a standalone climate justice campaign may not be feasible for many NECs, especially those with limited staff and resources. Indeed, that need not be the goal. Climate justice can serve as a lens for analysing and responding to longstanding challenges in the education sector, from access and equity to curricular improvements. The next step is not necessarily to mount new, dedicated campaigns but to integrate climate justice considerations into ongoing advocacy, research, and community engagement. The Learning Collaborative can seed work in this direction by facilitating early-stage strategic planning and reflection around what climate justice means in each NEC's context and by advising coalitions to identify existing programme areas where this framing can be applied.

Build a robust evidence base for climate justice advocacy in education. Data poverty continues to be a substantial barrier to effective advocacy. NECs like KoBLE and PEAN raised concerns about the availability and reliability of official data, especially in rural areas. In the long term, NECs may consider building or partnering on community-led data collection initiatives or participatory assessments that can provide credible, locally sourced evidence to influence education policymaking around climate issues. The Learning Collaborative can help set the stage for this project by guiding NECs through small scoping efforts.

Champion intersectional justice through education. NECs can advance long-term efforts to ensure that climate justice, through CCE and similar efforts, capacitates not only students but also women, Indigenous groups, persons with disabilities, and marginalised youth, both as learners and as agents of change in their communities.

Strengthen partnership with teachers and education unions as key allies in climate justice advocacy. Teachers are not only on the frontlines of climate change impacts in schools; more critically, they are the primary agents in shaping learners' knowledge and capacity for climate action. As education workers, they bring grounded perspectives on the needs and challenges within education systems. Most teachers and education unionists are already grappling with climate justice work in their professional lives and communities. This emphasis on recognising and empowering teachers as climate justice advocates aligns with the principles of the just transition framework. NECs, many of which count teachers' associations among their members, can benefit from more intentional partnerships with unions and other teacher-led groups to co-develop policy proposals, shape CCE implementation, and amplify the collective voice. The Learning Collaborative should facilitate deeper relationship-building and shared advocacy between NECs and education unions to ensure their climate advocacies are aligned and mutually reinforcing.

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