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UN Resident Coordinator Office



COOK ISLANDS

COUNTRY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (CIP) 2023-2024

Review

Acknowledgement

The UN Resident Coordinator extends gratitude to the UN Country Team for their invaluable contributions and commitment to delivering UN development support to Cook Islands

The Review of the CIP 2023-2024 for the Cook Islands has identified the value of our joint commitments as well as identifying crucial sectors for further collaborative efforts.

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Table of Contents

I.	Overview	3
II.	Budget Analysis	5
III.	UN Support and SDG Progress	6
IV.	UN Mode of Intervention	8
V.	UN Results by Cooperation Framework Pillar	9
A.	Planet	10
B.	People	13
C.	Prosperity	18
D.	Peace	20
VI.	Challenges	22
VII.	Conclusion and Way Forward	23
IX.	Appendices	
	Appendix 1: Figures	25
	Appendix 2: Heatmaps	30
	Appendix 3: Matrix	34
	Appendix 4: Detailed Narrative	37



OVERVIEW

This document presents a detailed review of the **Cook Islands Country Implementation Plan (CIP)**, focusing on the United Nations' (UN) contributions towards key development outcomes within the framework of the UN Pacific Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027 (henceforth the CF). The review encompasses critical areas such as environmental sustainability, social protection, economic development, and governance. Its primary objective is to assess how UN system resources have been allocated, their effectiveness in addressing Cook Islands' development needs, and the progress made towards achieving CF outcomes and supporting Cook Islands' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



UN Contribution Overview: The analysis is based on Figure 1.1, which provides a comprehensive overview of the UN's interventions, including the number of organisations involved and their focus areas. In the Cook Islands, 14 UN organisations contributed to achieving CIP outcomes, delivering 84 specific interventions across the four CF pillars—Planet, People, Prosperity, and Peace. The largest number of interventions was directed towards the People pillar mainly addressing gender, health, education, and social protection and the Planet pillar, reflecting the focus on climate resilience and environmental sustainability. While essential for economic development and governance, there were fewer interventions directed at the Prosperity and Peace pillars.

In financial terms, the total budget required to implement the Cook Islands CIP stands at USD \$9.8 million, with \$USD 6.8 million available . However, as of the review period, the actual expenditure was USD \$1.4 million, indicating a funding gap of USD \$3 million and a need to accelerate resource mobilisation efforts, especially in underfunded sectors like governance and economic growth. While significant progress has been made in key areas such as climate resilience and social well-being, underfunding the People and Peace pillars suggests that more attention is needed to ensure that social development, well-being, and governance initiatives receive adequate support. Addressing this imbalance will be critical for achieving inclusive and sustainable development in the Cook Islands. The expenditure shortfall suggests that, beyond the CF's global funding constraints, the UN faces challenges in effectively utilising its existing budget. This spending gap not only underscores operational hurdles but also presents an opportunity for the UN to establish mechanisms that enhance program implementation and optimise resource utilisation in the future.

UN system results: In 2023-2024, the UN in Cook Islands made impactful contributions across the core pillars of Planet, People, Prosperity, and Peace, aligning with national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.



Planet: Cook Islands achieved significant progress in environmental protection, climate resilience, and disaster preparedness. Initiatives included enhanced capacities for World Heritage nominations, supporting biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management. Despite some delays, waste management efforts advanced with a commitment to sustainable practices. Community-based citizen science initiatives promoted local ownership of climate data, and child-focused climate strategies fostered healthier environments for future generations. Regional training in tsunami preparedness and emergency medical logistics further bolstered disaster response, reinforcing resilience across the Pacific.

People: The UN supported advancements in health, social protection, education, and child welfare. Health worker training, enhanced immunisation systems, policies targeting non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health strengthened public health frameworks. A new National Social Assistance Policy and child-sensitive social protection training helped safeguard marginalised groups, while anti-malnutrition initiatives promoted healthier communities. Climate-resilient WASH projects improved access to clean water in schools and healthcare facilities. Educational milestones included a comprehensive analysis of early childhood education in the Cook Islands, the development of a regional skills framework, the integration of climate change education, and the collective fostering of safe and supportive learning environments.



Prosperity: In 2023-2024, sustainable economic growth in the Cook Islands emphasised agriculture, employment, and fiscal reform, with UN support enhancing climate-smart agriculture, youth and women's empowerment, and job creation initiatives. Regional training sessions contributed to gender-sensitive employment policies, while fiscal reforms aligned data-driven decision-making with national budgets to support vulnerable groups. These integrated approaches underscore a commitment to inclusive and resilient growth throughout the Cook Islands.

Peace: Cook Islands advanced significantly in justice, human rights, and civic engagement. Strengthened child protection systems and reformed immigration procedures aligned with human rights standards, ensuring safety for vulnerable populations. Over 120 participants were trained on labor law reforms to meet international standards, and improvements in treaty reporting for CEDAW and CRC reflected a commitment to human rights. Regional dialogues promoted civic engagement, with progress on National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) enhancing accountability and gender equality. Transformative steps toward establishing a Paris-Principles compliant NHRI underscore the Pacific's dedication to transparent, inclusive governance.

Through these achievements, the UN's collaborative efforts continue to drive sustainable, rights-based development and resilience across the Pacific.

Going forward, more needs to be done to ensure timely disbursements, address bottlenecks in program implementation, and close financial gaps, particularly in underfunded areas. A results framework with specific performance indicators should be developed immediately and, where available, aligned with the country's monitoring and evaluation framework attached to its national development strategy.



BUDGET ANALYSIS

The budget analysis for the Cook Islands CIP highlights varying levels of financial commitment and expenditure across the four pillars—Planet, People, Prosperity, and Peace—revealing key priorities and potential gaps in resource allocation. Overall, Figures 2.1-2.2 reveal the largest proportion of funding is directed towards the Prosperity and Planet pillars, reflecting the Cook Islands' focus on economic and environmental sustainability. The Prosperity pillar receives the highest available budget of USD \$3.6 million, followed by the Planet pillar with USD \$1.9 million. This distribution highlights the Cook Islands' prioritisation of economic growth and environmental challenges, including climate change and biodiversity protection. However, actual expenditure was limited, accounting for only 8 per cent under the Prosperity pillar and 9 per cent under the Planet pillar.

However, equally essential for social well-being and governance, the People and Peace pillars receive significantly less funding, with USD \$1.5 million and USD \$0.15 million, respectively. Although the available budget for the People and Peace pillars was smaller than the Prosperity and Planet pillars, actual expenditure relative to the allocated budget was significantly higher, reaching 78 per cent for the People pillar and 60 per cent for the Peace pillar. This disparity points to an imbalance in resource allocation, as strong social systems and effective governance are crucial for long-term development and sustaining progress in other areas. Moreover, the slower spending in the Prosperity and Planet pillar suggests delays or inefficiencies that could affect economic and environmental progress despite the significant financial commitment.

The comparative analysis suggests that while economic and environmental sectors are receiving considerable attention, the underfunding of social and governance sectors could hinder the Cook Islands' ability to develop a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient model. A more balanced allocation of resources, especially by increasing investments in the People and Peace pillars, is essential to ensure that social services and governance structures are strong enough to support environmental and economic progress. Addressing this imbalance will help create a comprehensive and robust framework for Cook Islands' future development.





UN SUPPORT & SDG PROGRESS



Figure 3.1 highlights the UN's investments in the Cook Islands, illustrating how its interventions are directed to achieve various SDG-related outcomes. When comparing these support with SDG progress in Figure 3.2, a clear relationship between financial allocation and focus on specific goals becomes evident. However, the alignment between intervention focuses and results is not uniform, which reflects both the strengths and challenges in resource utilisation. Estimates of the UN collective expenditure indicate that most funding was directed towards the SDGs of Gender Equality (SDG 5), Climate Action (SDG 13), and Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3), in that order. Conversely, the least investments during this period were made in Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), No Poverty (SDG 1), and Partnership for the Goals (SDG 17).

When organised by CF pillars—Planet (SDGs 7, 13, 14, 15), People (SDGs 2, 3, 4, 6), Prosperity (SDGs 1, 8, 9, 11, 12), and Peace (SDGs 5, 10, 16, 17)—the UN support does not fully align with the budget analysis. In practice, interventions related to the People pillar received the most focus, surpassing attention given to the Prosperity and Planet pillars. A comparison of support by SDG with the corresponding pillars helps to deepen this analysis. A significant focus is directed towards Climate Action (SDG 13), aligning with the largest budget allocation for the Planet pillar. While this suggests a strong focus on addressing environmental challenges, the slow progress on SDG 13 indicates that despite the high financial inputs, outcomes are hindered by structural challenges such as limited institutional capacity, technical constraints, and reliance on external expertise. This underscores the need for targeted capacity-building to ensure financial resources translate more effectively into tangible climate resilience outcomes.

Similarly, Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3) receive substantial attention, even though the People pillar allocates less significantly. Despite this, progress on SDG 3 faces obstacles, particularly in healthcare delivery and managing non-communicable diseases (NCDs). These challenges may be due to inefficiencies in health systems and the shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, highlighting the need for further investments in capacity development and health systems strengthening.

On the other hand, Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), which align with the Prosperity and Peace pillars, receive comparatively fewer interventions. This correlates with slower progress in these areas. For instance, limited support for SDG 8 indicates a lack of significant economic development initiatives, which could be a critical barrier to creating



sustainable economic opportunities and livelihoods. Similarly, SDG 16, focused on governance, justice, and strong institutions, remains underrepresented, limiting the ability to strengthen governance structures, justice systems, and human rights protections.

The comparative analysis of UN investments across SDGs and pillars shows that while there is strong alignment in resource allocation for SDG 13 and SDG 3, the interventions in economic development, (SDG 8) and governance (SDG 16) presents a risk to achieving balanced and sustainable development in the Cook Islands. The disparity between high activity levels in certain sectors and slower progress points to a need for more effective use of resources, particularly in strengthening institutional capacities and ensuring that economic and governance systems receive adequate attention alongside environmental and social objectives.

In conclusion, while the focus of interventions is aligned with priority areas, challenges in institutional capacity, technical expertise, and infrastructure impede the conversion of these interventions into accelerated progress across key SDGs. A more balanced distribution of resources and targeted capacity-building efforts are necessary to unlock the full potential of UN investments and ensure that progress across all pillars and SDGs is sustainable and inclusive.



PLANET



PEOPLE



PROSPERITY



PEACE



UN MODE OF INTERVENTION

Figure 4.1 - 4.3 depict UN interventions by delivery mode and by cross-cutting themes such as human rights, gender, peace, and Leave No One Behind (LNOB).

The UN Support Areas for the Cook Islands clearly focus on Capacity Development and Technical Assistance, which dominates the UN's 2023-2024 support. There is less emphasis on Convening/Partnerships, policy Advice, and Thought Leadership. Areas like Data Collection and Analysis, Direct Support/Service Delivery, and Normative Support receive minimal attention, indicating a strategic focus on long-term capacity building rather than addressing immediate, data-driven needs or short-term service delivery.



From a cross-cutting perspective, 13 per cent of UN interventions on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) identified this as a primary objective, while 26 per cent considered it a significant objective. However, UN organisations reported that 61 per cent of projects had minimal or no impact on gender equality. UN agency efforts showed a similar trend regarding peace sustainability, though there was a more focused approach to human rights issues. Specifically, UN organisations reported that 30 per cent of activities delivered in the first two years of the CIP were primarily aimed at addressing human rights, with 21 per cent marking this as a significant objective. Nonetheless, 25 per cent of agencies noted no focus on human rights within their interventions, compared to 19 per cent and 30 per cent indicating similar responses on gender and peace markers, respectively.

The LNOB principle is the UN 2030 Agenda's core transformative commitment. It ensures that marginalised, disadvantaged, or vulnerable individuals are included and benefit from development efforts. This commitment seeks to reduce inequalities by prioritising those furthest behind, creating a more inclusive and equitable world. LNOB objectives often overlap with UN goals related to human rights, gender, and peace.

Among UN projects delivered in the review period, 45 per cent identified as contributing to LNOB noted no specifically designated beneficiaries. In contrast, within the remaining 55 per cent of LNOB-related projects, nearly 20 per cent highlighted children as the main beneficiaries, followed by women and girls, and youth. Other beneficiaries included migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, human rights defenders, indigenous people, minorities, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) individuals.



UN RESULTS BY COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

The results reported for each output area under the CF pillars were based on the results' inputs provided by the UN organisations. Percentage contributions to each output area are assessed and presented via a Heatmap in Appendix 2.

The Heatmap highlights adequate and significant contributions across UN agencies' planned outputs. Assessed against the number of organisations initially planning to intervene in output areas, 6 of the 34 (18 per cent) output areas were deemed adequately serviced. This means that 18 per cent of the organisations with planned outputs did not deliver them. On the contrary, in 17 output areas, the UN's contributions were rated as significant, with an estimated 100 per cent contribution across the output areas. In other words, 50 per cent rated it as significant, and all agencies that had planned to intervene actually intervened during the review period. There were only three output areas where UN contributions were rated inadequate, and these were outputs 1.1.1 strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, policies, knowledge and skills to promote community-led biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and improve ecosystems; 1.3.1 strengthened institutions and community's capacities, mechanisms and policies to enhance climate change adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction. and 3.4.2 strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms and policies to enhance equal opportunities for decent jobs and livelihood. There were 8 output areas in which the UN had no contribution and these were outputs 2.3.2 enhanced [service level] capacity for evidence-based decision-making to produce and analyze timely data on food insecurity and malnutrition; 2.3.3 increased knowledge and attitudes in communities on healthy, balanced, nutrient-dense lifestyle and food consumption patterns; 2.4.2 strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms and policies on water, sanitation, and hygiene, to increase access to save, affordable and equitable WASH services, including in educational settings; 3.6.2 strengthened institutional policies and capacities on digital infrastructure and connectivity, including ICT-related services; 4.2.4 enhanced capacities and systems to identify security threats, including climate security; 4.3.3 Enhanced rights-based migration policy and its implementation, capacities, tools, mechanisms and initiatives on trans-boundary and migration governance and human mobility; 4.3.5 improved Government capacities to collect, analyze and utilize data and increased awareness of the right to privacy and data protection; and 4.4.3 the relevant institutions have the adequate power, mandate and capacity, and are sharing the responsibility to fight corruption (prevent, raise awareness of, detect, investigate and prosecute corruption).





Planet



Output 1.1.1:

Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, policies, knowledge, and skills to promote community-led biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and improve ecosystems, in line with UN climate and environment-related conventions.

In 2023, regional efforts focused on enhancing the capacities of Pacific Island countries to implement the World Heritage Convention and strengthen community-led biodiversity conservation. A regional workshop equipped participants with the skills to prepare Tentative Lists and World Heritage nominations, fostering increased regional representation on the World Heritage List. This initiative aligned with the Regional Work Plan for World Heritage in the Pacific 2021-2025, emphasizing knowledge-sharing and technical guidance. Preparatory actions are underway to expand partnerships with regional organizations, ensuring continued support for biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource management.

The UN also enabled the expansion of biodiversity conservation through the establishment of the Takitumu Conservation Area (the first Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure in the Pacific) and the development of the Rarotonga Passages Management Plan (to safeguard biodiversity in the Southern passages of Rarotonga).

Contributing agencies:



Output 1.1.3:

Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution.

Progress in enhancing integrated waste management faced delays due to challenges in finalizing legal agreements between participating countries and the executing agency. Staff turnover further impacted implementation timelines. Despite these setbacks, efforts continue to stabilize project management and complete the necessary agreements to initiate activities aimed at reducing hazardous waste and marine pollution.

In 2024, the Cook Islands Government, with UN and SPREP support, submitted its Minamata Initial Assessment Report, which identified mercury release sources, assessed capacity needs, and proposed strategies for mercury management and awareness.



A new UN-Cook Islands partnership project under the GEF-8 Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution programme was approved, securing \$6.2 million (2025–2030) to reduce single-use plastics in the food and beverage industry and promote sustainable alternatives, mitigating plastic waste and pollution.

Contributing agencies:



Output 1.2.2:

Increased use of evidence-based approaches and nature-based solutions in building resilience and adaptive capacity among community and institutional actors.

Efforts to strengthen climate resilience in the Pacific region have focused on promoting evidence-based approaches and nature-based solutions. Through regional initiatives, communities have been encouraged to engage in citizen science, contributing to climate change observations and fostering local ownership of resilience-building activities. These activities are laying the groundwork for expanding nature-based solutions and adaptive strategies at the national level, enhancing the region's capacity to respond to climate challenges. In partnership with local NGOs/CSOs, the UN has also empowered communities to implement nature based solutions to improve natural resource management and local livelihoods.

Contributing agencies:



Output 1.2.3:

Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution.

A new regional strategy was launched to promote child-centric climate resilience, aiming to ensure that children live in healthy and sustainable environments and are better prepared for climate-related shocks. This strategy has enhanced technical expertise in climate and disaster risk reduction, leading to improved collaboration with regional partners and more effective engagement on climate resilience issues across the Pacific.

Contributing agencies:



Output 1.3.1:

Strengthened institutions' and communities' capacities, mechanisms, and policies to enhance climate change adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction.

Key training programs were delivered to strengthen regional and national capacities for disaster preparedness, hydro-meteorology and tsunami readiness. Representatives including women from national institutions gained skills to better engage in regional warning systems and enhance their disaster response capabilities. This support has contributed to a more coordinated approach to disaster risk reduction, monitoring of hydro-meteorology, earthquake and tsunami hazards in the Pacific, aligning with broader efforts to build resilience against climate-related events.

The UN-Cook Islands partnership under the UN-GCF Programme (2021–2026) achieved significant progress in establishing integrated climate and ocean information services and multi-hazard early warning systems (MHEWS) in the Cook Islands.



In 2023-2024, Cook Islands Meteorological Service (CIMS) and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) enhanced capacity and collaboration through participation in regional workshops and meetings on early warning systems, climate services, and meteorology, including training on the use of global climate prediction tools and leadership development in meteorology and hydrology. These efforts strengthened national systems for inclusive early warning and improved technical capabilities in climate and disaster management.

Contributing agencies:



Output 1.3.2:

Enhanced capacities of national mechanisms for effective and inclusive disaster management.

Regional initiatives have focused on building disaster preparedness capacities, including developing standard operating procedures for emergency medical assistance teams and conducting logistics training for rapid deployment. These efforts have enhanced the ability of national mechanisms to respond effectively to emergencies, ensuring that response teams can operate self-sufficiently and provide critical support during crises. Additionally, investments in national capacities for early detection and response to public health emergencies have bolstered the region’s preparedness for acute health threats.

In May 2024, a MISP Training of Trainers was conducted for Samoa, Cook Islands, and Niue, resulting in 16 health workers trained to deliver lifesaving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services during crises. Each country developed plans to enhance local capacities, ensuring improved access to SRH services for women, girls, and marginalized groups in humanitarian settings.

The Disaster Risk Reduction work plan aligned with the Cook Islands Disability Act was developed, and a Disability Resource Team was established; also, disability data is now integrated into the Geoportal map for emergency response, which issues early warning alerts to ensure timely communication in case of disasters.

Output 1.4.1:

Contributing agencies:



Increased availability and use o disaggregated data (based on gender, location, disability, etc.) and analytics in planning Climate Change Mitigation (CCM) and resilience building.

With UN and regional partner support, the Cook Islands initiated efforts to strengthen institutional, technical, and human capacities, enabling compliance with the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement, including greenhouse gas inventory systems and a robust Measurement-Reporting-Verification framework.

Contributing agencies:





People



Output 2.1.1:

Strengthened capacities for delivering high-quality, resilient people-oriented public health services.



Significant progress was made in enhancing immunisation and healthcare delivery capacities. Health workforce capabilities were strengthened through fellowships, supporting nurses and anaesthesiologists to advance their skills, thereby building a more competent health workforce. Additionally, specialized training in dentistry, peri-operative nursing, and anesthesia improved the quality of care provided, ensuring better patient outcomes. Investments in cold chain and immunization systems were assessed, providing valuable insights into maintaining vaccine efficacy and improving delivery mechanisms across multiple Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), including the Cook Islands. MOH Pharmacy and Therapeutic Products Amendment Regulations was completed.

Notable results were achieved in prevention of communicable diseases of HIV, STIs, and TB through community outreach and awareness, testing and distribution of preventive packages, and adopting a mainstreamed approach in synergy with existing Government programmes.

To address low contraceptive prevalence and high adolescent birth rates, Cook Islands developed a Family Planning training package aligned with WHO guidelines, training 18 health-care providers from six islands to deliver youth-friendly, disability-inclusive services. Contraceptives delivered in early 2024 are estimated to have protected 756 couples.

Contributing agencies:



World Health Organization



Output 2.1.2:

Strengthened national public health governance for improved health outcomes.

Efforts to strengthen the health system's response to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), emerging infectious diseases, and climate change impacts have increased the system's resilience. Consistent access to family planning services was ensured through the distribution of contraceptives, providing an estimated 932 Couple-Years of Protection (CYP). This has directly contributed to better reproductive health outcomes. Guidelines on physical activity and diet were finalized to promote healthier lifestyles, alongside a national road safety campaign aimed at reducing injury and fatalities. Enhancements to health information systems have enabled better data collection, analysis, and action planning, supporting targeted responses to public health challenges like childhood obesity.



Parliament passed key health legislation, including the Tobacco Products Control Act, banning imitation tobacco products, and the Public Health Act, strengthening measures to prevent disease, protect public health, and promote well-being.

The Cook Islands Ministry of Health, is developing a comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Policy, action strategy, and costed implementation plan to strengthen the framework for improving SRH outcomes nationwide.

Contributing agencies:



Output 2.1.3:

Enhanced capacities for emergency response and continuity of public health services.

New policy frameworks, including tobacco control, cancer management, and mental health, were finalized, providing a strategic direction for the country’s response to critical health issues. Additionally, a mid-term review of the Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) Policy identified priority areas for further action, guiding continued efforts to reduce the burden of NCDs. The Healthy Aging Policy and strategy development support ensured that aging populations receive appropriate care and attention, strengthening the country’s ability to respond to demographic changes and associated health needs. A pandemic preparedness plan was finalized. In addition, an Oxygen Plant was installed and commissioned at the Aitutaki hospital to provide a steady supply of oxygen on the outer Island.

Contributing agencies:



Output 2.2.1:

Expanded access to inclusive, evidence-based social protection systems.

The development of a new National Social Assistance Policy marked a significant step toward a more inclusive social protection system. This policy aims to extend support to marginalized groups, including migrant workers and children. High-level training on child-sensitive social protection was conducted, engaging senior policymakers and community stakeholders, which has laid the foundation for a more responsive and inclusive approach to social protection across the country.

Contributing agencies:



Output 2.3.1:

Improved policy environment for access to nutritious food and healthy lifestyles.

A comprehensive advocacy package was developed and launched, focusing on tackling malnutrition across the Pacific. This initiative, presented during a regional forum, generated strong commitment from leaders to address the issue of nutrition and implement effective measures. The guidelines on physical activity and healthy diets provided a framework for community-level actions to improve public health and reduce diet-related health risks.



The Cook Islands Ministry of Health expanded the scope of practice for midwives and nurses by finalizing new standing orders, enabling them to provide sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services previously limited to medical doctors, thereby increasing access to essential care.

Contributing agencies:



Output 2.4.1:

Enhanced capacity to deliver climate-resilient WASH services.

Efforts to strengthen water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services led to the piloting of a climate-resilient water supply system, improving access to safe water in schools and healthcare facilities. Community engagement activities identified critical gaps in existing WASH services, enabling targeted improvements and fostering greater resilience to climate-related disruptions.

Contributing agencies:



Output 2.5.1:

Improved national capacity to deliver quality learning and skill development.

Key achievements include the completion of an Early Childhood Education (ECE) subsector analysis in the Cook Islands, which informed future education sector planning and enhanced early learning outcomes. A collaborative effort among 16 countries led to the creation of the Pacific All-life Skills Framework, offering a cohesive regional approach to skills development from early childhood to adult education. Additionally, in-country workshops on climate change education and ESD integrated Greening Education into teacher training, engaging schools, teachers' unions, and youth networks. This initiative promoted awareness, youth-led actions, and peer-to-peer learning, supported by targeted resources and advocacy materials. A sub-regional study on cultural policies for Small Island Developing States provided insights into key trends and policy recommendations, shaping regional cooperation strategies and guiding contributions to global dialogues on culture and sustainable development at MONDIACULT 2022.

Contributing agencies:



Output 2.5.2:

Safe, protective, healthy school environments free from violence and discrimination.

A regional forum brought together leaders from 15 Pacific Island countries to reaffirm their commitment to early childhood development (ECD) as a key strategy for building climate resilience. The endorsement of key action points emphasized the importance of integrating ECD into broader climate and disaster resilience strategies, fostering environments that are safer and more supportive for children's growth and development.

Contributing agencies:



**Output 2.5.3:****The education system is better equipped to provide equitable and innovative learning pathways, starting from early childhood and throughout the lifecycle.**

The Cook Islands actively engaged in regional discussions on Inclusive Education, contributing to the Regional Review in 2020 and 2022. These efforts strengthened the foundation for integrating Inclusive Education into the National Education Sector Plan, with further planning anticipated in 2024 to align thematic goals with national priorities.

Contributing agencies:**Output 2.5.4:****National Ministry has enhanced evidence-based and risk-informed education plans, policies and coordination mechanisms for transformed and resilient education systems.**

The completion of an Early Childhood Education subsector analysis in the Cook Islands provided valuable data to inform forthcoming education sector plans. Additionally, insights gained from a 15-country COVID-19 Education Response study captured key innovations and lessons, supporting the development of regional knowledge and tools within the coordinated education framework.

Regional dialogue on education priorities and challenges was furthered through the 25th Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) Consultation in March 2023, which brought together representatives from 13 member states. This consultation addressed critical topics, including education financing, quality, teacher support, and regional framework implementation, fostering collaborative efforts and shared learning across the Pacific education systems.

Contributing agencies:**Output 2.7.2:****Strengthened institutional capacity for human-rights-focused policies and mechanisms.**

Strengthened child protection systems resulted from efforts to improve legal frameworks, enhance multi-sectoral coordination, and conduct research on violence against children. This has provided a foundation for better safeguarding children's rights and ensuring their protection in various settings, contributing to a more responsive and inclusive social environment.

Contributing agencies:

**Output 2.7.3:****Increased awareness of harmful norms and effects of violence.**

Community-based interventions and training programs aimed at preventing violence against children were rolled out, raising awareness and equipping community members with the knowledge and tools to address harmful practices. This has contributed to a safer environment for children by fostering a culture of zero tolerance toward violence and promoting positive norms.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs raised awareness on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including among people with disabilities, LGBTQI, and aging populations, through educational sessions during the 16 Days of Activism and White Ribbon Day events in November 2024. Male role models advocated for ending GBV through the “Man to Man” program.

Contributing agencies:



Prosperity



Output 3.3.1:

Strengthened sustainable, climate-smart, gender and youth-sensitive agriculture and fishery sectors through holistic policies and boosted sustainable food production systems, improved Agri-processing.

Cook Islands has made significant strides toward sustainable, climate-smart agriculture and fisheries sectors through enhanced policies and boosted food production systems. Strengthened by advancements in agricultural data processing and analysis, decision-making in the agricultural sector is now more data-driven, guiding sustainable transformations across agrifood systems. Initiatives included comprehensive census and stock-take surveys for agriculture and fisheries, alongside the development of agrifood systems statistics that support cross-sectoral policymaking. This progression has enhanced capacity within the Ministry of Agriculture, fostering a supportive environment for climate-smart agriculture that equally benefits youth and women, further integrating gender and youth considerations into agricultural growth and sustainability.

Contributing agencies:



Output 3.4.2:

Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, and policies to enhance equal opportunities for decent jobs and livelihood.

Institutional capacities in Cook Islands have seen notable improvements, particularly in creating equal opportunities for decent jobs and livelihoods. Through targeted regional trainings on Labour Market Statistics and Evidence-based Policymaking, as well as active participation in regional coordination meetings, Cook Islands has strengthened its position on labour mobility. This concerted approach resulted in enhanced coordination among employer organizations on labour migration, ultimately supporting job creation and improving labour standards. Additionally, progress in formulating the National Employment Policy (NEP) has laid a strong foundation for promoting gender-inclusive employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, guided by inputs from key stakeholders. These developments are underscored by improved capacity in national labour data collection and analysis, bolstering evidence-based decision-making on employment policies.

Contributing agencies:



**Output 3.5.2:****Strengthened capacity of institutions and entrepreneurs on financial and fiscal issues, including the new tax reform and debt management.**

Financial and fiscal reforms in Cook Islands have been fortified through enhanced capacity-building on fiscal policy and debt management, focusing particularly on vulnerable populations. Technical support has improved data collection processes, ensuring that policy and budget decisions increasingly account for the needs of children and families. Furthermore, steps have been taken to align planning processes with the national budgetary framework, facilitated by the review and updating of sector planning and monitoring manuals. Although reforms and evolving national priorities prevented immediate finalization, these efforts have established a foundational basis for future initiatives in budget alignment and fiscal policy, which will contribute to more inclusive financial planning and sustainable economic development in Cook Islands.

This integrated approach across agriculture, employment, and fiscal reform domains highlights the commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth that benefits all segments of the Cook Islands society.

Contributing agencies:**Output 3.6.2:****Strengthened institutional policies and capacities on digital infrastructure and connectivity, including ICT-related services.**

Following a Digital Readiness Assessment, the UN supported a review and update of ICT Legal & Policy frameworks resulting in the identification of entry points for institutional and legislative reforms to facilitate the implementation and execution of strategic actions to enable digital transformation. The UN is also supporting a Digital Accessibility Platform Strategy for PWDs and making digital content and services for disability users available through a centralised digital platform.

Contributing agencies:



Peace



Output 4.1.1:

Strengthened institutional capacities for increasing access to justice, the rule of law, and human rights, especially those at risk of being left behind, in compliance with international human rights standards.

Progress was made in enhancing child protection systems through targeted training, resource development, and improved data collection and reporting. These efforts strengthened the capacity of relevant authorities to better protect the rights of vulnerable children and improve access to justice. In addition, regional engagement on immigration and asylum issues ensured that officials across the Pacific have better access to referral guidance and support, promoting adherence to international human rights standards for asylum seekers.

Contributing agencies:



Output 4.1.4:

Increased compliance of domestic laws with international human rights standards.

Key achievements include the strengthening of labour law capacities through a sub-regional workshop that improved participants' understanding of labour law reform and interpretation. Participants applied these skills through case studies, ensuring that national labour laws align more closely with international human rights conventions. Over 120 participants benefited from these capacity-building efforts, enhancing the ability of multiple Pacific Island countries to update their legal frameworks. Support was also provided to review the Employment Relations Act.

Contributing agencies:



Output 4.1.5:

Increased capacities for state party reporting to human rights treaty bodies.

Delegations from the region actively participated in international processes related to gender equality and women's empowerment, contributing to global discussions on women's rights. Technical support for reporting under key human rights treaties such as CEDAW and CRC improved the capacity of countries to meet their reporting obligations. In particular, knowledge-sharing exchanges enhanced understanding of children's rights and built capacity to implement recommendations on child protection, domestic violence, and children's rights in the justice system.

Contributing agencies:



**Output 4.2.2:**

Communities and right holders are empowered to participate in political processes through expanded civic space and dialogue.

Civic engagement was strengthened through participation in regional human rights dialogues, including events that highlighted the importance of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in promoting accountability, gender equality, and combating violence. These dialogues provided a platform for exchanging experiences and reinforcing the role of accountability mechanisms in ensuring that communities and right holders can effectively participate in political processes.

A tripartite delegation from the Cook Islands actively contributed to the High-Level Dialogue on Decent Work and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, resulting in enhanced alignment of national priorities with regional labor strategies. Their participation in the International Labour Conference further strengthened Cook Islands' engagement in shaping global labor policies.

Contributing agencies:**Output 4.3.1:**

Enhanced institutional and other capacities among NHRIs and other oversight independent bodies to effectively uphold transparency and accountability.

Efforts to transform the Ombudsman's Office into a Paris-Principles compliant NHRI made significant progress, with regional advocacy efforts reinforcing the need for such an institution. Although planned consultations were delayed, participation in high-level regional events strengthened the case for establishing an NHRI, which is critical for upholding transparency and accountability in line with international human rights standards.

Contributing agencies:



CHALLENGESⁱⁱ

The Cook Islands CIP Review identifies significant gaps and limitations that hinder the full realization of the country's development goals. These challenges arise from multiple areas across the UN's interventions, as highlighted in other sections of the document. Some key challenges include:

Funding Gaps and Underinvestment: There is a noticeable funding gap in the implementation of the CIP, especially for the Planet and Peace pillars. Despite substantial investments in the Prosperity pillar (focusing on economic sustainability) and the People pillar (addressing health, education, and social protection), the underfunding of governance programs has impeded progress in these critical areas. This imbalance threatens the broader sustainable development framework, as well as the Cook Islands' ability to achieve long-term, inclusive development

Institutional Capacity Constraints: Across multiple areas, from climate resilience to health services, progress has been stymied by institutional capacity constraints. In particular, sectors such as climate action (SDG 13) and health (SDG 3) suffer from the lack of technical expertise and insufficient capacity to translate financial inputs into tangible outcomes. For example, climate resilience initiatives often rely on external expertise, and healthcare systems face a shortage of skilled professionals, undermining the impact of investments.

Implementation Delays: Delays in executing legal agreements and finalizing project management frameworks have slowed progress in economic development, integrated waste management and other environmental initiatives. These delays, often exacerbated by staff turnover and bureaucratic inefficiencies, are notable in both Prosperity and Planet pillars, where slower spending and delayed project execution hinder economic and environmental sustainability efforts.

Limited Focus on Governance and Social Protection: Governance (Peace pillar) have received limited financial support, leaving critical areas such as justice reform, human rights protection, and civic engagement under-resourced. The lack of focus on governance systems poses a risk to sustaining progress made in other sectors, including gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Data and Evidence Gaps: Limited emphasis on data collection and analysis affects the ability of the UN and the Cook Islands government to monitor progress and make data-driven decisions. This gap is particularly evident in areas like social protection and education, where a stronger evidence base is required to guide targeted interventions.

Addressing these challenges will require a more balanced resource allocation, stronger institutional capacity-building efforts, and improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that investments translate into concrete outcomes.





CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The Cook Islands CIP Review highlights critical gaps and challenges that impede the country's ability to achieve its development objectives. Key challenges include funding imbalances, institutional capacity constraints, implementation delays, limited focus on governance and social protection, and significant data and evidence gaps. Despite substantial progress in areas such as economic sustainability and social sectors, underfunded governance programs and weak institutional capacity risk undermining overall development efforts, particularly in climate resilience, health services, and governance systems.

Way Forward:

- 1. Rebalancing Resource Allocation:** To address funding gaps, particularly in the Planet and Peace pillars, a more balanced approach to resource allocation is essential. Future efforts should prioritize the underfunded governance, environmental sustainability, and social protection sectors. This may require joint resource mobilization strategies, enhanced partnerships, and advocacy for more equitable funding across all pillars.
- 2. Strengthening Institutional Capacity:** Capacity-building initiatives are critical for sectors that lack the technical expertise to maximize available resources. Targeted interventions should focus on enhancing local expertise, especially in climate resilience and health services, to reduce reliance on external support. Building long-term capacity within key institutions will ensure that investments translate into sustainable outcomes.
- 3. Accelerating Implementation Processes:** Addressing the bureaucratic inefficiencies and delays in legal agreements and project frameworks will be crucial to expedite the implementation of key initiatives. A review of project management processes, combined with strategies to mitigate staff turnover, can help improve execution timelines and ensure more timely outcomes in economic and environmental sustainability projects.
- 4. Prioritizing Governance and Social Protection:** The underfunding of the Peace pillar, particularly in areas such as justice reform, human rights, and civic engagement, poses a risk to broader development progress. It is critical to increase financial and technical support to governance systems, which underpin the long-term sustainability of achievements in other sectors like gender equality and environmental sustainability.





- 5. Enhancing Data Collection and Monitoring:** To improve decision-making and ensure effective interventions, efforts should focus on addressing the current data and evidence gaps. Investing in stronger data collection, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms will allow both the UN and the Cook Islands government to track progress accurately and adjust strategies based on evidence.

Moving forward, a concerted effort is required to balance resource allocation, build local capacity, streamline project implementation, and strengthen governance systems. Enhanced monitoring and data-driven decision-making will also be essential to ensure that investments deliver sustainable and inclusive development outcomes for the Cook Islands.



ⁱ The available resources relate to the total amount raised by agencies to deliver on the CIPs over the entire period 2023-2027. This is meant to clarify, however, that in principle there were enough resources available to deliver on the planned interventions up to the period 2024.

ⁱⁱ The theme we selected for challenges is derived from the narratives uploaded in UNInfo



APPENDIX 1:

GRAPHS AND CHARTS

Figure 1.1: Cook Islands CIPs at a glance

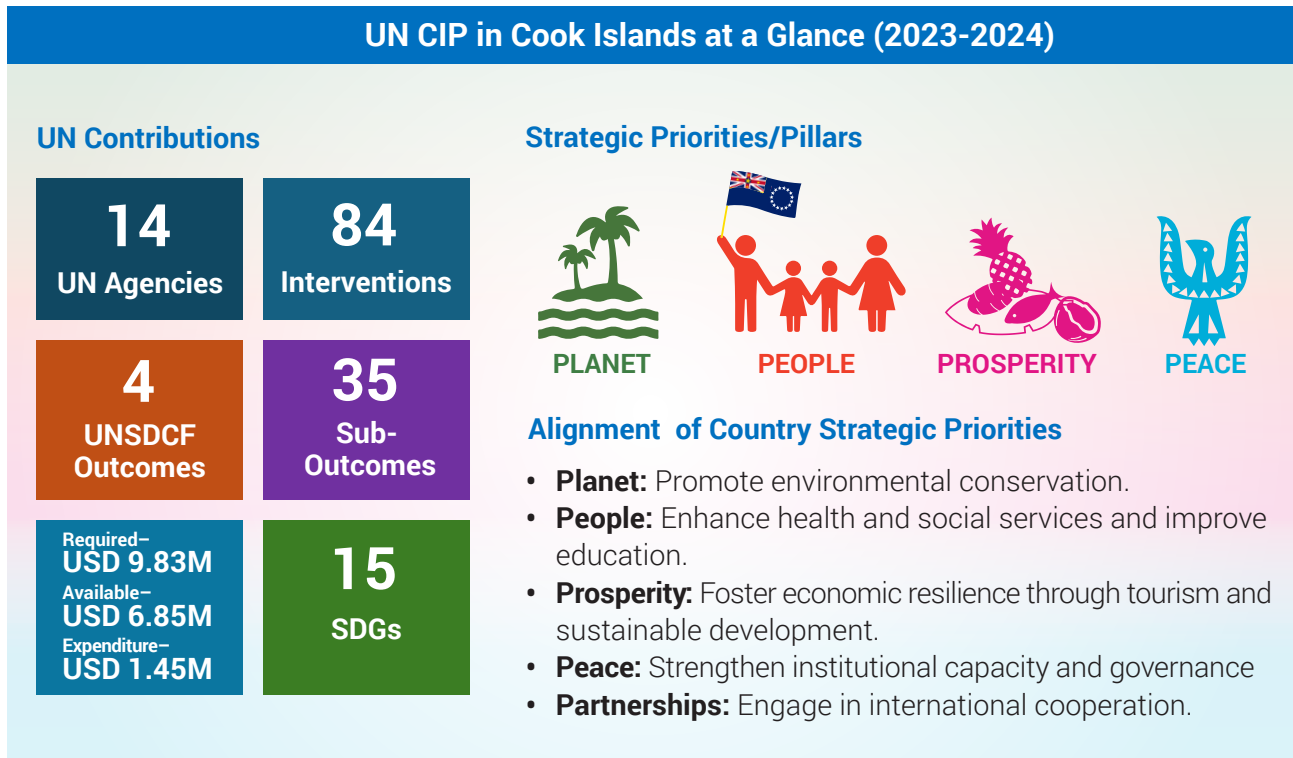


Figure 2.1: Cook Islands Resource Allocation (USD)

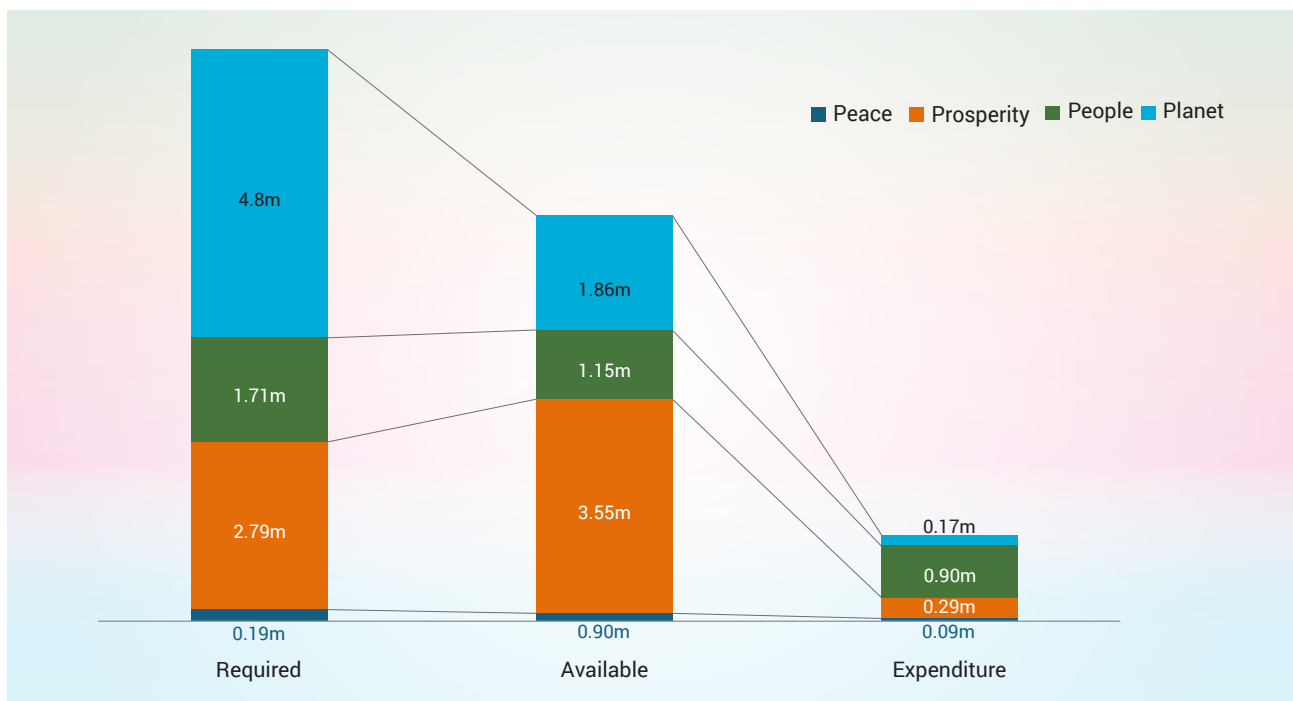




Figure 2.2: Cook Islands Resource Allocation by CF Pillar (USD)

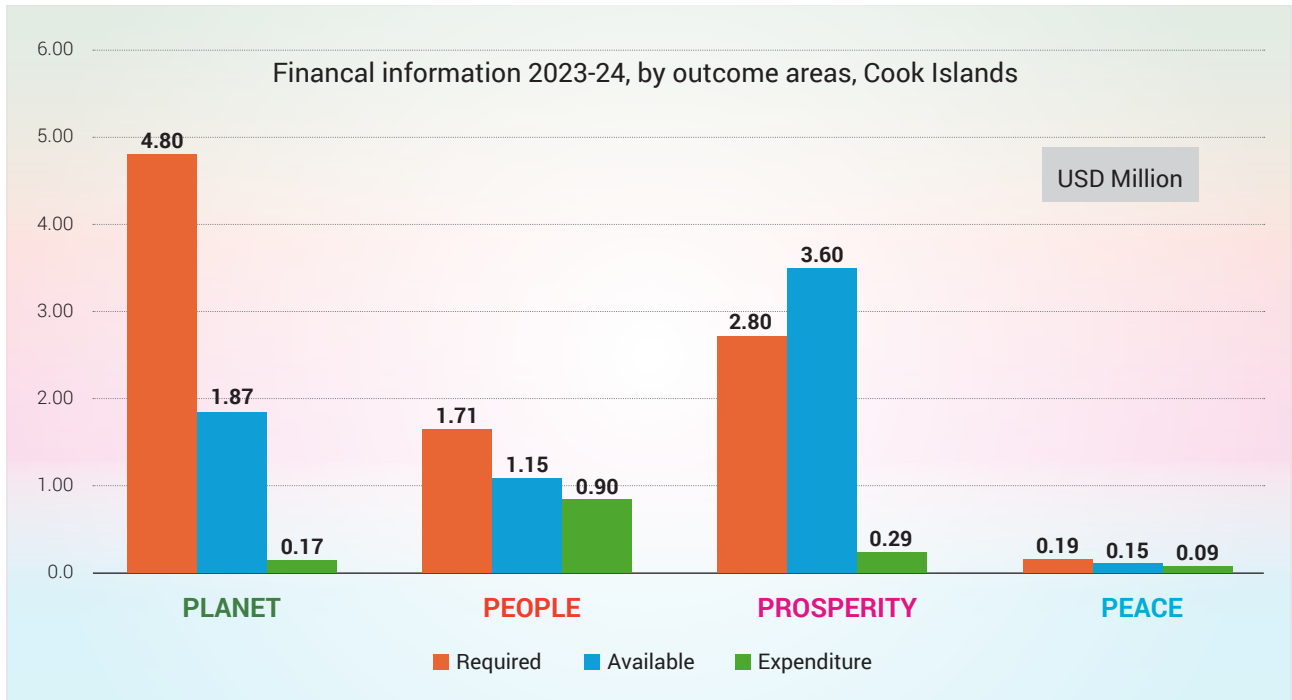


Figure 3.1: UN investments in Cook Islands





Figure 3.2: Cook Islands progress by SDG

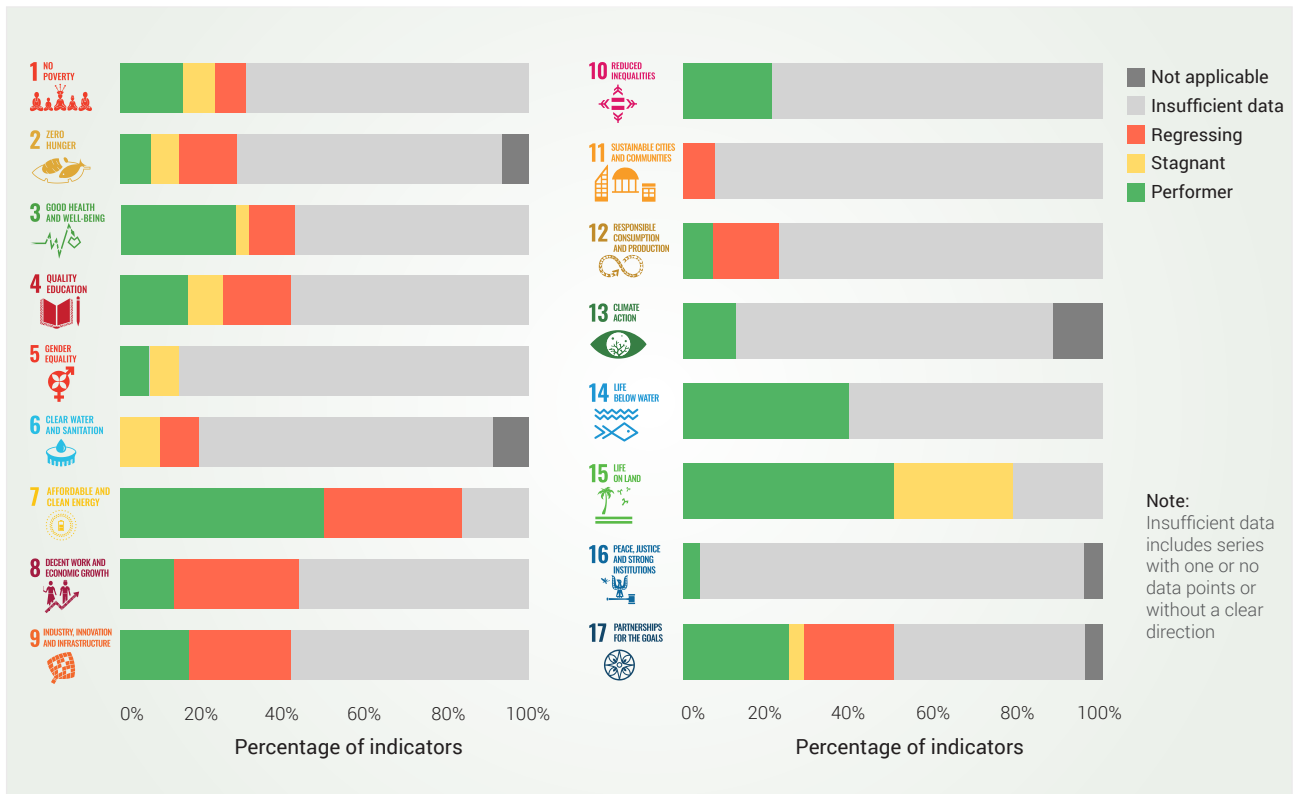


Figure 4.1: UN Specific Interventions

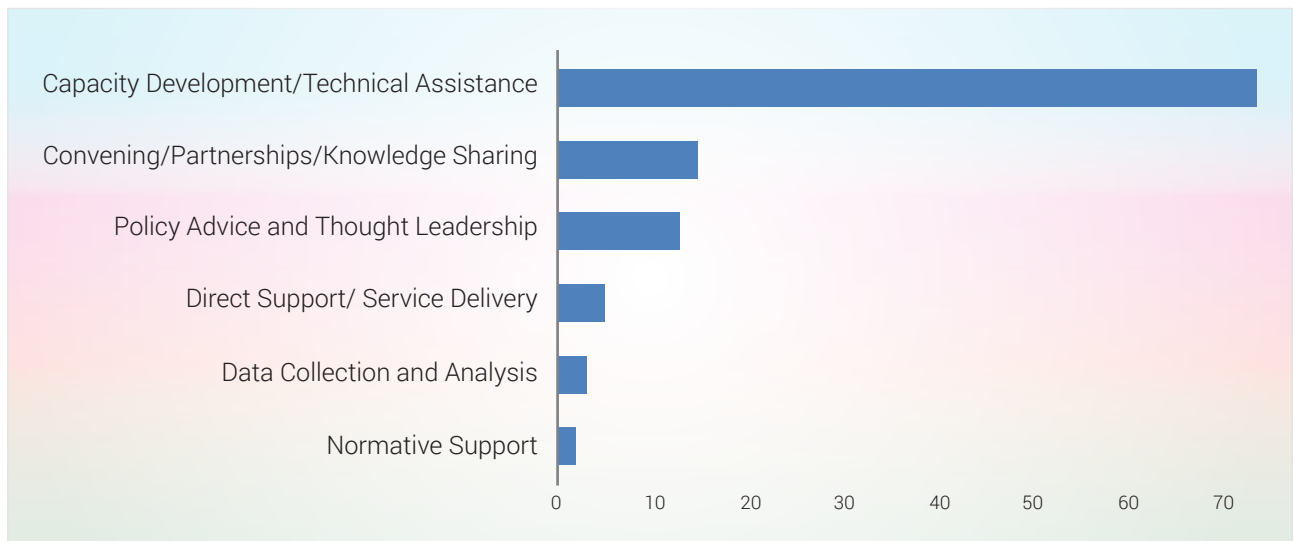




Figure 4.2: Cross Cutting Interventions

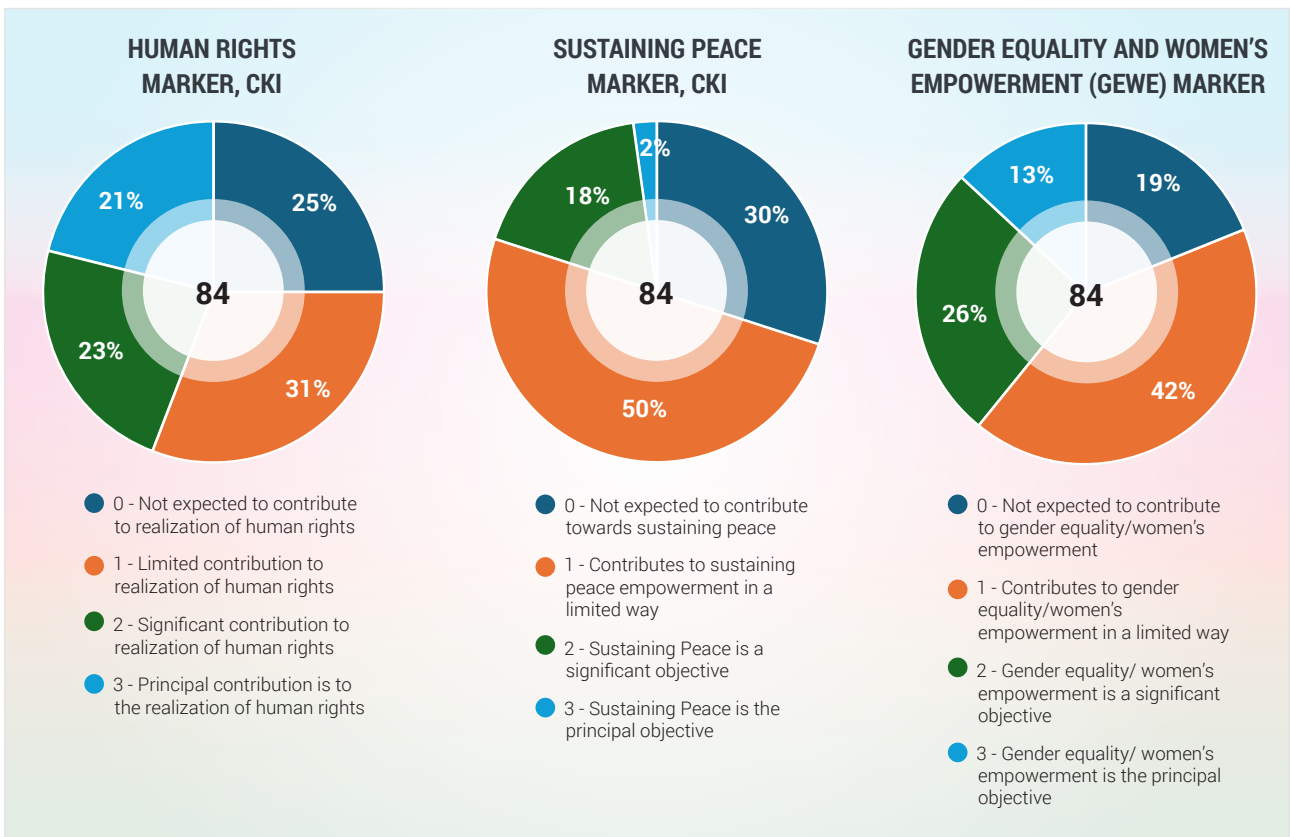
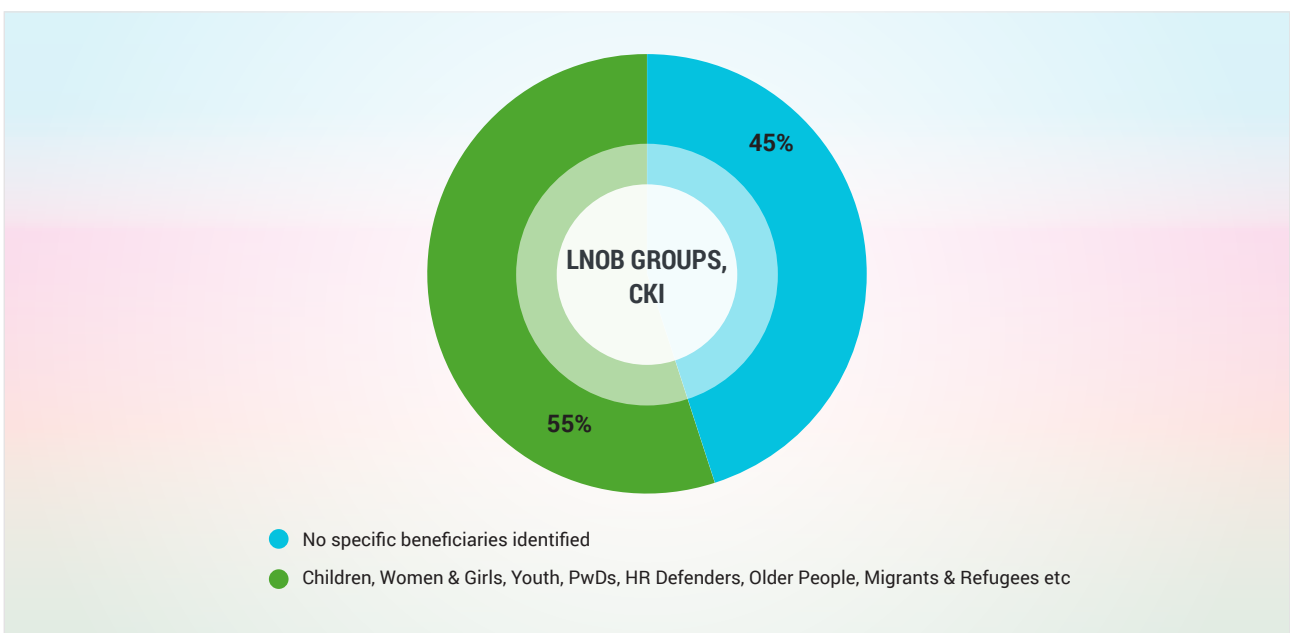
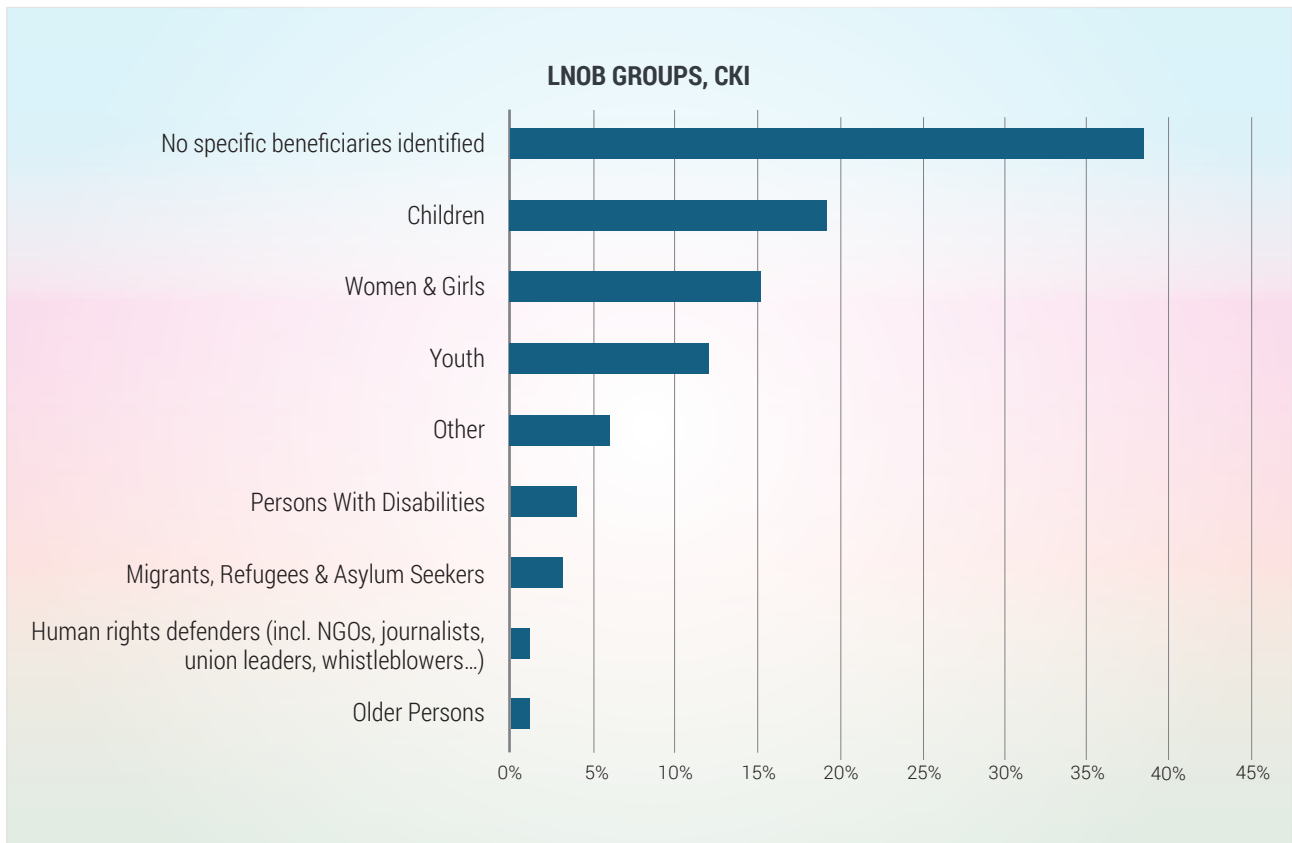


Figure 4.3: Interventions to LNOB







APPENDIX 2:

HEATMAP ON UN'S REPORTING FOR COOK ISLANDS

Outputs	LIST OF OUTPUT AREAS	UN Contributions (agencies)			
		Full (81-100%)	Adequate (41-80%)	Inadequate (1-40%)	No contribution 0%

PLANET

1.1.1	Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, policies, knowledge and skills to promote community-led biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and improve ecosystems, in line with UN climate and environment-related conventions			33%	
1.1.3	Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution	100%			
1.2.2	Increased used of evidence-based approaches and nature-based solutions in building resilience and adaptive capacity among community and institutional actors		50%		
1.2.3	Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution	100%			
1.3.1	Strengthened institutions and communities capacities, mechanisms and policies to enhance climate change adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction.			40%	
1.3.2	Enhanced capacities of national mechanisms for effective and inclusive disaster management.	100%			

PEOPLE

2.1.1	Strengthened [service provider] capacities to deliver high-quality, resilient people-oriented [public health services] at [service level] for children, youth, elderly, people with disabilities, and people of vulnerable groups enabled through [Strategies]		66%		
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2.1.2	National public health governance capacity strengthened to [governance functions] for improved [Governance outputs]	100%			
2.1.3	[Stakeholder] capacities enhanced for the [Emergency response actions] to public health emergencies and ensure the continuity of services	100%			
2.2.1	Expanded access to more inclusive and evidence-based social protection systems for vulnerable groups	100%			
2.3.1	Improved [policy and regulatory] environment to promote [access and consumption] of [adequate, affordable, safe, diverse and nutritious food], [in line with traditional knowledge and farming practices] and [healthy lifestyles].	100%			
2.3.2	Enhanced [service level] capacity for evidence-based decision-making to produce and analyze timely data on food insecurity and malnutrition				
2.3.3	Increased knowledge and attitudes in communities on healthy, balanced, nutrient-dense lifestyle and food consumption patterns.				
2.4.1	Enhanced capacity among service providers to deliver safe and sustainable climate-resilient WASH services in Schools and Healthcare facilities	100%			
2.4.2	Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms and policies on water, sanitation, and hygiene, to increase access to safe, affordable and equitable WASH services, including in educational settings.				
2.5.1	Improved National government capacity to deliver relevant, inclusive, quality learning and skill development		66%		
2.5.2	School environments in [Country] are more safe, protective, healthy and hygienic, free from violence and discrimination	100%			
2.5.3	The education system in [country] is better equipped to provide equitable and innovative learning pathways, starting from early childhood and throughout the lifecycle	100%			
2.5.4	[National Ministry] has enhanced evidence-based and risk-informed education plans, policies and coordination mechanisms for transformed and resilient education systems	100%			



2.7.2	Strengthened institutional capacity and mechanisms to enable more conducive and inclusive human-rights-focused policies, legislation, and mechanisms to design and implement effective systems to prevent, mitigate and respond to discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence, violence against children, and persons with disabilities		50%		
2.7.3	Increased individual and community awareness of harmful norms and drivers and effects of violence		50%		

PROSPERITY

3.3.1	Strengthened sustainable, climate-smart, gender and youth sensitive agriculture and fishery sectors through holistic policies and boosted sustainable food production systems, improved Agri-processing.	100%			
3.4.2	Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms and policies to enhance equal opportunities for decent jobs and livelihood.			33%	
3.5.2	Strengthened capacity of institutions and entrepreneurs on financial and fiscal issues, including the new tax reform and debt management.	100%			
3.6.2	Strengthened institutional policies and capacities on digital infrastructure and connectivity, including ICT-related services.				

PEACE

4.1.1	Strengthened institutional capacities for increasing access to justice, the rule of law and human rights especially those at risk of being left behind, in compliance with international human rights standards.	100%			
4.1.4	Increased compliance of domestic laws with international human rights standards	100%			
4.1.5	Increased capacities for state party reporting to human rights treaty bodies		66%		
4.2.2	Communities and right holders are empowered to participate in political processes through expanded civic space and dialogue	100%			
4.2.4	Enhanced capacities and systems to identify security threats, including climate security				



4.3.1	Enhanced institutional and other capacities among NHRIs and other oversight independent bodies to effectively uphold transparency and accountability.	100%			
4.3.3	Enhanced rights-based migration policy and its implementation, capacities, tools, mechanisms and initiatives on trans-boundary and migration governance and human mobility.				
4.3.5	Improved Government capacities to collect, analyse and utilize data and increased awareness of the right to privacy and data protection.				
4.4.3	The relevant institutions have the adequate power, mandate and capacity, and are sharing the responsibility to fight corruption (prevent, raise awareness of, detect, investigate and prosecute corruption)				



APPENDIX 3:

MATRIX

Pillars/ Outcome areas	List of Outputs	Reported	Not Reported	
COOK ISLANDS				
Planet	1.1.1	Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, policies, knowledge and skills to promote community-led biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and improve ecosystems, in line with UN climate and environment-related conventions	UNESCO UNDP	FAO IAEA
	1.1.3	Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution	UNEP	
	1.2.2	Increased used of evidence-based approaches and nature-based solutions in building resilience and adaptive capacity among community and institutional actors	UNESCO UNDP	FAO
	1.2.3	Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution	UNICEF	
	1.3.1	Strengthened institutions and communities capacities, mechanisms and policies to enhance climate change adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction.	UNICEF UNESCO WMO UNDP	FAO IAEA
	1.3.2	Enhanced capacities of national mechanisms for effective and inclusive disaster management.	UNICEF UNESCO WHO	
People	2.1.1	Strengthened [service provider] capacities to deliver high-quality, resilient people-oriented [public health services] at [service level] for children, youth, elderly, people with disabilities, and people of vulnerable groups enabled through [Strategies]	UNICEF WHO UNDP	UNFPA
	2.1.2	National public health governance capacity strengthened to [governance functions] for improved [Governance outputs]	UNICEF UNFPA WHO	
	2.1.3	[Stakeholder] capacities enhanced for the [Emergency response actions] to public health emergencies and ensure the continuity of services	WHO	
	2.2.1	Expanded access to more inclusive and evidence-based social protection systems for vulnerable groups	UNICEF	
	2.3.1	Improved [policy and regulatory] environment to promote [access and consumption] of [adequate, affordable, safe, diverse and nutritious food], [in line with traditional knowledge and farming practices] and [healthy lifestyles].	UNICEF	



People	2.3.2	Enhanced [service level] capacity for evidence-based decision-making to produce and analyze timely data on food insecurity and malnutrition		IAEA
	2.3.3	Increased knowledge and attitudes in communities on healthy, balanced, nutrient-dense lifestyle and food consumption patterns.		FAO
	2.4.1	Enhanced capacity among service providers to deliver safe and sustainable climate-resilient WASH services in Schools and Healthcare facilities	UNICEF	
	2.4.2	Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms and policies on water, sanitation, and hygiene, to increase access to safe, affordable and equitable WASH services, including in educational settings.	UNICEF	
	2.5.1	Improved National government capacity to deliver relevant, inclusive, quality learning and skill development	UNICEF UNESCO	UNFPA
	2.5.2	School environments in [Country] are more safe, protective, healthy and hygienic, free from violence and discrimination	UNICEF	
	2.5.3	The education system in [country] is better equipped to provide equitable and innovative learning pathways, starting from early childhood and throughout the lifecycle	UNICEF	
	2.5.4	[National Ministry] has enhanced evidence-based and risk-informed education plans, policies and coordination mechanisms for transformed and resilient education systems	UNESCO UNICEF	
	2.7.2	Strengthened institutional capacity and mechanisms to enable more conducive and inclusive human-rights-focused policies, legislation, and mechanisms to design and implement effective systems to prevent, mitigate and respond to discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence, violence against children, and persons with disabilities	UNICEF	UNFPA
	2.7.3	Increased individual and community awareness of harmful norms and drivers and effects of violence	UNICEF	UNFPA
Prosperity	3.3.1	Strengthened sustainable, climate-smart, gender and youth sensitive agriculture and fishery sectors through holistic policies and boosted sustainable food production systems, improved Agri-processing.	FAO	
	3.4.2	Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms and policies to enhance equal opportunities for decent jobs and livelihood.	ILO	IAEA UNFPA
	3.5.2	Strengthened capacity of institutions and entrepreneurs on financial and fiscal issues, including the new tax reform and debt management.	UNDP UNICEF	
	3.6.2	Strengthened institutional policies and capacities on digital infrastructure and connectivity, including ICT-related services	UNDP	FAO



Peace	4.1.1	Strengthened institutional capacities for increasing access to justice, the rule of law and human rights especially those at risk of being left behind, in compliance with international human rights standards.	UNICEF UNCHR	
	4.1.4	Increased compliance of domestic laws with international human rights standards	ILO	
	4.1.5	Increased capacities for state party reporting to human rights treaty bodies	UN-Women OHCHR	UNFPA
	4.2.2	Communities and right holders are empowered to participate in political processes through expanded civic space and dialogue	OHCHR	
	4.2.4	Enhanced capacities and systems to identify security threats, including climate security		UNIDO
	4.3.1	Enhanced institutional and other capacities among NHRIs and other oversight independent bodies to effectively uphold transparency and accountability.	OHCHR	
	4.3.3	Enhanced rights-based migration policy and its implementation, capacities, tools, mechanisms and initiatives on trans-boundary and migration governance and human mobility.		UNIDO
	4.3.5	Improved Government capacities to collect, analyse and utilize data and increased awareness of the right to privacy and data protection.		UNFPA
	4.4.3	The relevant institutions have the adequate power, mandate and capacity, and are sharing the responsibility to fight corruption (prevent, raise awareness of, detect, investigate and prosecute corruption)		UNIDO



APPENDIX 4:

Detailed Narrative

PLANET – NIUE



Output 1.1.1:

Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, policies, knowledge, and skills to promote community-led biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and improve ecosystems, in line with UN climate and environment-related conventions.

UNESCO:

With support from the Government of Australia, UNESCO strengthened the capacity of Pacific Island countries to implement the World Heritage Convention. A regional workshop in Nadi, Fiji (November 2023) provided technical guidance to Pacific Island representatives on developing Tentative Lists and World Heritage nominations, aiming to increase the region’s representation on the World Heritage List. The workshop aligned with the Regional Work Plan for World Heritage in the Pacific 2021-2025, focusing on equipping participants with skills to navigate World Heritage processes. All Pacific States Parties participated, along with CROP agencies and other stakeholders, fostering regional collaboration. Preparations for additional activities are underway, including an Expression of Interest (EoI) to be shared with countries and partnership development with the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO).

UNDP:

UNDP supported the expansion of biodiversity conservation through the establishment of the Takitumu Conservation Area (115 hectares), the first Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM) in the Pacific. This area protects the Kākerōri/Rarotonga flycatcher (*Pomarea dimidiata*), one of the world’s most threatened birds. Furthermore, the Rarotonga Passages Management Plan was developed to safeguard biodiversity in the Southern passages of Rarotonga. This plan provides guidelines for habitat conservation, sustainable tourism, and capacity development while ensuring compliance and monitoring contributing to the improved management of the Rarotonga Marine Protected Area

**Output 1.1.3:****Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution.****UNEP:**

The implementation of a regional waste management project faced delays due to prolonged legal agreement processes with participating countries and staff turnover, including the resignation of the previous Project Manager. These challenges have stalled progress, with ongoing efforts to finalize legal agreements and stabilize project management.

In 2024, the Cook Islands Government, with UN and SPREP support, submitted its Minamata Initial Assessment Report, which identified mercury release sources, assessed capacity needs, and proposed strategies for mercury management and awareness.

A new UN-Cook Islands partnership project under the GEF-8 Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution programme was approved, securing \$6.2 million (2025–2030) to reduce single-use plastics in the food and beverage industry and promote sustainable alternatives, mitigating plastic waste and pollution.

Output 1.2.2:**Increased use of evidence-based approaches and nature-based solutions in building resilience and adaptive capacity among community and institutional actors.****UNESCO:**

UNESCO advanced regional activities under the IslandWatch initiative to promote citizen science and local community involvement in climate change observations. These efforts aim to empower local communities through evidence-based monitoring and contribute to climate resilience across the Pacific. National-level activities are currently under development to expand the initiative's reach.

UNDP:

In partnership with local NGOs/CSOs, UNDP empowered communities to implement nature based solutions to improve natural resource management and local livelihoods.

Output 1.2.3:**Strengthened policies for integrated waste management, including hazardous waste and marine pollution.****UNICEF:**

UNICEF Pacific launched its first Climate, Energy, Environment, and Disaster Risk Reduction (CEED) strategy in 2023. The strategy aims to ensure that children live in healthy, sustainable environments and are resilient to climate-related shocks, positioning them as active change agents. A climate specialist was recruited to enhance technical expertise and strengthen strategic partnerships with key climate stakeholders across the region.





unicef



UNEP



WMO



unicef

World Health
Organization

Output 1.3.1:

Strengthened institutions' and communities' capacities, mechanisms, and policies to enhance climate change adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction.

UNICEF:

No specific interventions were implemented for this output in 2023.

UNESCO:

UNESCO facilitated capacity-building for EMCI and the Cook Islands Met Service through participation in the Regional Training on the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready Recognition Programme in Nadi, Fiji. The training aimed to enhance tsunami readiness and contributed to regional disaster preparedness efforts. Representatives also participated in the 9th and 10th Meetings of the ICG/PTWS Pacific Island Countries and Territories Regional Working Group, further strengthening their engagement in regional tsunami warning systems.

UNEP:

The UN-Cook Islands partnership under the UN-GCF Programme (2021–2026) achieved significant progress in establishing integrated climate and ocean information services and multi-hazard early warning systems (MHEWS) in the Cook Islands.

WMO:

In 2023-2024, Cook Islands Meteorological Service (CIMS) and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) enhanced capacity and collaboration through participation in regional workshops and meetings on early warning systems, climate services, and meteorology, including training on the use of global climate prediction tools and leadership development in meteorology and hydrology. These efforts strengthened national systems for inclusive early warning and improved technical capabilities in climate and disaster management.

Output 1.3.2:

Enhanced capacities of national mechanisms for effective and inclusive disaster management.

UNICEF:

UNICEF provided technical support to countries in preparing for and responding to natural disasters, ensuring readiness for effective emergency response efforts.

UNESCO:

UNESCO conducted a two-week Emergency Response and Preparedness (ERP) workshop for heritage institutions in the Pacific, aiming to strengthen their ability to safeguard cultural heritage in the face of emergencies. The workshop focused on equipping participants with the skills needed for rapid and effective disaster response.

WHO:

WHO supported the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the Cook Islands Emergency Medical Assistance Team (KukiMAT). Additionally, logistics training was provided to enhance the team's capability to deploy independently, ensuring the delivery of life-saving care without burdening crisis-affected communities.



WHO's support also included strengthening national capacities for surveillance, detection, verification, and response to acute public health events.

UNFPA:

In May 2024, a MISP Training of Trainers was conducted for Samoa, Cook Islands, and Niue, resulting in 16 health workers trained to deliver lifesaving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services during crises. Each country developed plans to enhance local capacities, ensuring improved access to SRH services for women, girls, and marginalized groups in humanitarian settings.

UNDP:

UNDP's technical assistance to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Cook Islands National Disability Council resulted in advancing disability inclusion. A Disaster Risk Reduction work plan aligned with the Cook Islands Disability Act was developed, and a Disability Resource Team was established. In partnership with Emergency Management Cook Islands and Meteorological Service, disability data is now integrated into the Geoportal map for emergency response, which issues early warning alerts to ensure timely communication in case of disasters.

Output 1.4.1:

Increased availability and use of disaggregated data (based on gender, location, disability, etc.) and analytics in planning Climate Change Mitigation (CCM) and resilience building

UNEP:

With UN and regional partner support, the Cook Islands initiated efforts to strengthen institutional, technical, and human capacities, enabling compliance with the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement, including greenhouse gas inventory systems and a robust Measurement-Reporting-Verification framework.





PEOPLE – COOK ISLAND

Output 2.1.1:

Strengthened service provider capacities for delivering high-quality, resilient people-oriented public health services

UNICEF

In 2023, UNICEF assessed the effectiveness of investments in cold chain and immunization supply chains through Effective Vaccine Management Assessments (EVMAs) in 10 PICTs, including Cook Islands. The assessment highlighted key strengths and areas for improvement in maintaining vaccine efficacy.

WHO

WHO enhanced immunization capacities by training mid-level managers in immunization planning and management, laying the groundwork for introducing new vaccines in 2025. WHO also strengthened the health workforce through fellowships, supporting 10 nurses in completing a Bachelor of Nursing program and anesthesiologists in advancing their skills through a Master's program. Short courses in dentistry, peri-operative nursing, and anesthesia further enhanced specialized care capabilities, contributing to a skilled workforce delivering quality health services. In addition to a successful roll out of the Healthy and Smokefree Islands Initiative in Cook Islands. Where community health screenings was conducted, with individuals/ Families educated of their health status.

UNFPA:

To address low contraceptive prevalence and high adolescent birth rates, Cook Islands developed a Family Planning training package aligned with WHO guidelines, training 18 health-care providers from six islands to deliver youth-friendly, disability-inclusive services. Contraceptives delivered in early 2024 are estimated to have protected 756 couples.

UNDP

Notable results were achieved in prevention of communicable diseases of HIV, STIs, and TB through community outreach and awareness, testing and distribution of preventive packages, and adopting a mainstreamed approach in synergy with existing Government programmes. A national forum was successfully conducted, as a platform for key stakeholders to deliberate on Cook Islands HIV/TB response and prevention plans.



World Health Organization





Output 2.1.2:

Strengthened national public health governance for improved health outcomes

UNICEF

UNICEF provided technical support to strengthen the health system's response to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), emerging infectious diseases, and climate-related health challenges, enhancing system resilience.

UNFPA

In 2023, UNFPA distributed contraceptives across all 14 PICTs, including the Cook Islands, providing an estimated 932 Couple-Years of Protection (CYP) based on quarterly reports. This ensured consistent access to family planning options. The Cook Islands Ministry of Health, with support, is developing a comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Policy, action strategy, and costed implementation plan to strengthen the framework for improving SRH outcomes nationwide.

WHO

WHO supported the Cook Islands in finalizing Physical Activity and Dietary Guidelines to promote healthy lifestyles. The organization also led the implementation of the National Road Safety Action Plan, enhancing road safety awareness and reporting. WHO strengthened health information systems, building capacities in data collection and analysis, particularly in oral health and NCDs, to inform targeted interventions for childhood obesity and other public health priorities.

Output 2.1.3:

Enhanced stakeholder capacities for emergency response and continuity of services

WHO

WHO supported the finalization of the National Tobacco Policy and National Cancer Policy, alongside the review of the Mental Health and Healthy Aging Policies. These efforts laid the foundation for a new Mental Health Strategy in 2024 and enhanced the country's approach to aging. A mid-term review of the NCD Policy identified priority areas for continued support, ensuring sustained progress in addressing key health challenges. launch of the National Pandemic Preparedness, which will lead to an improved inter-agency (Public, Private and Community based organizations) coordination and collaboration to respond to health emergencies. A successful KukiMAT Team Member Training Workshop was conducted, to raise the responsibility and accountability of Health workforce to emergency responses. In addition to supporting the Antimicrobial resistance week, to raise the capacity of health workforce (Clinicians and Prescribers) on clinical guidelines on Antibiotics.

Output 2.2.1:

Expanded access to inclusive, evidence-based social protection systems

UNICEF

UNICEF facilitated the development of the new National Social Assistance Policy in the Cook Islands, advocating for the inclusion of migrant workers and children. The policy, now under Cabinet review, aims to create a more inclusive social protection system. UNICEF also delivered child-sensitive social protection training, engaging policymakers and stakeholders from various sectors to strengthen support for children across the Cook Islands.



Output 2.3.1:

Improved policy environment for access to nutritious food and healthy lifestyles

UNICEF

UNICEF launched an advocacy package for addressing malnutrition across 14 PICTs, including the Cook Islands, during the Pacific Early Childhood Development Forum. The launch created momentum among high-level delegates to prioritize nutrition and implement strategies to combat malnutrition.

UNFPA:

The Cook Islands Ministry of Health expanded the scope of practice for midwives and nurses by finalizing new standing orders, enabling them to provide sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services previously limited to medical doctors, thereby increasing access to essential care.

Output 2.4.1:

Enhanced capacity to deliver climate-resilient WASH services

UNICEF

UNICEF provided technical support for improving WASH services in schools and healthcare facilities, including piloting a climate-resilient water supply system and engaging communities to identify and address gaps in WASH service delivery.

Output 2.5.1:

Improved national capacity to deliver quality learning and skill development

UNICEF

The Cook Islands completed an Early Childhood Education (ECE) subsector analysis, guiding future education sector planning and enhancing early learning outcomes.

UNESCO

UNESCO collaborated with the Cook Islands and 15 other PacREF countries to develop the Pacific All-life Skills Framework, providing a regional approach to skills development from early childhood through to adult education.

UNESCO, in partnership with the Ministries of Education and COPE, delivered in-country workshops on climate change education and ESD, directly integrating Greening Education into teacher training. These efforts engaged PHES, ASP Net schools, teachers' unions, and youth networks, raising awareness and fostering youth-led actions. The initiative facilitated peer-to-peer learning and exchanges, while complementary resources and advocacy materials were developed to support sustainable education efforts.

The sub-regional study on cultural policies of Small Island Developing States, aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, identified key trends, priorities, and policy recommendations. Peer-reviewed by SPC, the study informed regional cooperation strategies, guiding SPC's intervention at the MONDIACULT 2022 side event on culture and sustainable development. It also shaped the interventions of seven Pacific delegations during the conference in Mexico City, contributing to regional cultural policy dialogues.

**Output 2.5.2:****Safe, protective, healthy school environments free from violence and discrimination****UNICEF**

UNICEF supported the Pacific Regional Council for ECD's 2023 Forum, where 15 Pacific Island countries, including Cook Islands, reaffirmed their commitment to integrating ECD into climate resilience strategies, aiming to strengthen community adaptability through investments in early childhood development.

Output 2.5.3:**The education system in [country] is better equipped to provide equitable and innovative learning pathways, starting from early childhood and throughout the lifecycle****UNICEF:**

The Cook Islands actively engaged in regional discussions on Inclusive Education, contributing to the Regional Review in 2020 and 2022. These efforts strengthened the foundation for integrating Inclusive Education into the National Education Sector Plan, with further planning anticipated in 2024 to align thematic goals with national priorities.

Output 2.5.4:**[National Ministry] has enhanced evidence-based and risk-informed education plans, policies and coordination mechanisms for transformed and resilient education systems****UNICEF:**

The Cook Islands completed an Early Childhood Education subsector analysis, providing data to inform upcoming education sector planning. Additionally, UNICEF contributed to a 15-country COVID-19 Education Response study, capturing innovations and lessons learned, while advancing regional knowledge and tools through PacREF, guided by key stakeholders.

UNESCO:

As Secretariat for the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES), UNESCO facilitated regional education dialogue on priorities and challenges, co-hosting the 25th PHES Consultation in March 2023 with the Government of Tuvalu, attended by 13 member states. This consultation addressed key areas such as education financing, quality, teacher support, and PacREF implementation, enhancing regional collaboration and shared learning.

Output 2.7.2:**Strengthened institutional capacity for human-rights-focused policies and mechanisms****UNICEF**

UNICEF's technical support helped strengthen child protection systems by enhancing legal frameworks, improving multi-sectoral coordination, and conducting research on the impact of violence against children, contributing to a safer environment for children in the Cook Islands.





Output 2.7.3:

Increased awareness of harmful norms and effects of violence

UNICEF

UNICEF provided training and launched community-based interventions to prevent violence against children, raising awareness and equipping communities with tools to address harmful practices and promote safer environments.

UNFPA:

The Ministry of Internal Affairs raised awareness on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including among people with disabilities, LGBTQI, and aging populations, through educational sessions during the 16 Days of Activism and White Ribbon Day events in November 2024. Male role models advocated for ending GBV through the “Man to



PROSPERITY – COOK ISLANDS



Output 3.3.1:

Strengthened sustainable, climate-smart, gender and youth-sensitive agriculture and fishery sectors through holistic policies and boosted sustainable food production systems, improved Agri-processing.

FAO

FAO supported Cook Islands in enhancing agricultural data processing and analysis, contributing to data-driven decision-making in agriculture. This included the design, implementation, and analysis of the Census of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Agriculture Stock-Take Sample Survey, alongside targeted capacity development for Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) staff. Additionally, FAO facilitated the identification, development, and dissemination of agrifood systems statistics, which support cross-sectoral policy-making and accelerate the sustainable transformation of Cook Islands’ agrifood systems. This initiative strengthened the MoA’s ability to drive policies that foster sustainable, climate-smart agriculture, benefiting diverse stakeholders, including youth and women in agriculture

Output 3.4.2:

Strengthened institutional capacities, mechanisms, and policies to enhance equal opportunities for decent jobs and livelihood.

ILO

The ILO’s engagement in Cook Islands has bolstered employer and worker organizations through comprehensive capacity-building initiatives. Cook Islands representatives participated in regional trainings on Labour Market Statistics (January 2023) and Evidence-based Policy-making (July 2023), as well as in the regional Bipartite Workers’ and Employers’ meeting on labour mobility in Nadi, Fiji.



A regional coordination meeting in Nadi, with participants from 11 Pacific Island countries, resulted in an agreement to strengthen employer coordination on labour migration, positively impacting labour mobility and job opportunities in Cook Islands.

Additionally, ILO supported the development of Cook Islands' first National Employment Policy (NEP), emphasizing job creation, entrepreneurship, gender inclusion, and labour standards. The policy drafting began in 2023, following a NEP capacity-building workshop in October, where key stakeholders, including government and employer representatives, actively contributed. A technical workshop in September 2023 strengthened the capacity of the National Statistics Offices in Fiji, Tonga, and Cook Islands to conduct Labour Force Surveys, aligning the survey questionnaire with international standards to ensure robust labour data collection and analysis.

Output 3.5.2:

Strengthened capacity of institutions and entrepreneurs on financial and fiscal issues, including the new tax reform and debt management.

UNICEF

UNICEF provided technical assistance to enhance data collection and analysis focused on children and families in Cook Islands. This support aims to strengthen the evidence base for policy and budget decisions impacting child and family welfare, thereby contributing to inclusive fiscal policy reform and ensuring that financial planning considers the needs of vulnerable populations.

UNDP

UNDP supported the alignment of Cook Islands' planning processes with the national budgetary framework by reviewing and updating the Sector Planning Manual and the Samoa Monitoring & Evaluation Results Framework Manual. While project insights informed these drafts, ongoing reforms and new national priorities prevented the manuals from finalization. Despite the project's end in 2023, this support laid foundational work for future budget alignment initiatives in Cook Islands. UNDP also carried out the Development Finance Assessment (DFA) to assist identify and pursue opportunities to mobilise and efficiently utilise available and additional financial resources to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Output 3.6.2

Strengthened institutional policies and capacities on digital infrastructure and connectivity, including ICT-related services.

UNDP

Following a Digital Readiness Assessment, UNDP supported a review and update of ICT Legal & Policy frameworks resulting in the identification of entry points for institutional and legislative reforms to facilitate the implementation and execution of strategic actions to enable digital transformation. UNDP is also supporting a Digital Accessibility Platform Strategy for PWDs and making digital content and services for disability users available through a centralised digital platform.





PEACE – COOK ISLANDS

Output 4.1.1:

Strengthened institutional capacities for increasing access to justice, the rule of law, and human rights, especially those at risk of being left behind, in compliance with international human rights standards.



UNICEF:

Significant progress was made in strengthening child protection systems through the provision of technical support, which included training, the development of resources, and enhanced data collection and reporting mechanisms. These improvements helped build the capacity of relevant authorities to better protect children's rights and ensure access to justice for vulnerable children.



UNHCR:

While there were no new developments related to asylum seekers in the Cook Islands in 2023, UNHCR strengthened its engagement with the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC), enhancing its regional role in ensuring access to territory and asylum across Pacific Island Countries. This included the dissemination of referral guidance fact sheets to officials, helping to build capacity for responding to asylum cases in compliance with international human rights standards.

Output 4.1.4:

Increased compliance of domestic laws with international human rights standards.



ILO:

The Sub-regional Labour Law Training Workshop held in Fiji in 2023 resulted in significant capacity-building for participants from the Cook Islands and other Pacific countries. Key principles of labour law reform were discussed, and participants applied their knowledge through case studies. This led to improved understanding of labour law review and interpretation, ensuring that national labour laws are better aligned with international standards. In total, 126 participants benefited from capacity-building trainings, including 93 participants (47 women and 46 men) who attended in-person workshops.

Output 4.1.5:

Increased capacities for state party reporting to human rights treaty bodies.



UN-Women:

Delegations from the Cook Islands participated in regional and global intergovernmental processes, such as the 67th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67) and the Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting (PIFWLM). These engagements focused on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Technical support was provided for CEDAW reporting, further enhancing the capacity of the Cook Islands to report on its obligations under international human rights treaties.

**OHCHR:**

In 2023, the Cook Islands received technical support for preparing its CEDAW report. Additionally, a regional CRC Learning Exchange facilitated knowledge-sharing on children's rights issues, with the participation of Cook Islands government representatives. This exchange improved understanding of key issues such as child protection, domestic violence, and children's rights in the justice system, enhancing the Cook Islands' capacity to implement the recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Output 4.2.2:

Communities and right holders are empowered to participate in political processes through expanded civic space and dialogue.

OHCHR:

As part of the Human Rights 75 Initiative, a side event was convened during the Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting in the Cook Islands, focusing on the role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in promoting gender equality, combating violence, and supporting people-centered development. The event highlighted the Cook Islands' Ombudsman's Office, which played a key role in the discussions, reinforcing the need for strong accountability mechanisms to ensure access to justice and human rights.

Output 4.3.1:

Enhanced institutional and other capacities among NHRIs and other oversight independent bodies to effectively uphold transparency and accountability.

OHCHR:

Support was provided to the Cook Islands Ombudsman's Office to advance its transformation into a Paris-Principles compliant National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). While planned consultations with stakeholders were delayed, participation in regional events strengthened advocacy for the establishment of a formal NHRI. This effort is crucial to building transparency, accountability, and compliance with international human rights standards.



