

Pacific Plastic Policy, Materials Substitutes and Financing a Green Transition Workshop
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National representatives from Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, Nauru, and Solomon Islands.
Representatives from academia, private sector, CSOs, and development partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honored to stand before you today as we gather for a significant and pivotal event – the "Pacific Plastic Policy, Materials Substitutes, and Financing a Green Transition Workshop", co-hosted by the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. This assembly signifies a momentous occasion where we, as diverse and vibrant communities of the Pacific, unite to address the pressing challenge of plastic pollution.

The Pacific region, known as the Blue Pacific Continent, not only embraces its natural beauty but its leaders have also taken determined steps towards environmental sustainability.

Our assembly today represents a unified commitment to address the global crisis of plastic pollution, transcending geographic boundaries. The issue related to plastics impacts every corner of our planet but has a particularly severe impact on small island states in the Pacific.

Our nations rely on the ocean economy, and as we embrace the ocean's bounty, we are equally susceptible to the detrimental effects of plastic pollution, endangering our coastal areas, fisheries, tourism, and urban infrastructure. The Pacific plastics crisis is not solely an environmental concern, but one that profoundly affects our societies and economies.

Nonetheless, within this challenge, we recognize a profound potential for positive change. Pacific nations possess a unique blend of natural resources and human ingenuity. Despite limited productive capacities, we have the potential to pioneer innovative industries centered on material substitutes, offering a path towards sustainability and economic prosperity.

Our path toward a sustainable, plastic-free future has a dual focus. Firstly, we recognize the environmental benefits of replacing single-use plastics with locally sourced material substitutes, particularly from biomass and marine resources, providing innovative, low-pollution alternatives to reduce plastic reliance. Secondly, the transition to material substitutes carries the potential for economic development and prosperity, creating employment, income, and economic growth by leveraging indigenous resources for sustainability and resilience.

The workshop, in alignment with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Oceans Programme and Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution Programme, tackles pressing global concerns with a solid evidential basis. In the realm of

plastic pollution, staggering facts reveal a doubling of global plastic production by 2040 and over 11 million metric tons of plastic waste entering oceans annually. Additionally, the omnipresence of microplastics poses health and ecological risks, underlining the urgency of addressing this issue.

On the waste management front, the World Bank's projection of a 3.40 billion metric ton waste generation by 2050 highlights the gravity of the situation. The exponential growth in electronic waste and the necessity of transitioning to a circular economy for sustainable waste management further emphasize the workshop's importance. Finally, in the context of the green transition, the decreasing costs of renewable energy, the rising prominence of electric vehicles, and the commitment to ambitious climate targets, as set by the Paris Agreement, underscore the need for comprehensive action to mitigate environmental pollution and propel the global transition towards a greener, more sustainable future.

This work revolves around four key objectives: identifying opportunities and needs for Indo-Pacific island states in addressing plastic pollution; emphasizing the importance of material substitutes derived from local resources; exploring various financial sources for sustainable industry sectors; and enhancing the capacity of stakeholders, including environmental authorities, legislators, industry players, financiers, policymakers, and community leaders, through shared knowledge and collaborative efforts to effectively tackle the plastic pollution challenge.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office is at the forefront of supporting Pacific nations in addressing the pressing plastic pollution challenges through a multifaceted approach. Within this comprehensive effort, UNDP Pacific actively promotes circular economy principles, aiming to reduce waste generation and create economic opportunities in the region through its Experiments under the UNDP Pacific Accelerator Lab project. Through capacity-building workshops, government officials, community leaders, and entrepreneurs are equipped with the necessary skills to effectively manage plastic pollution.

In addition, UNDP Pacific plays a significant role in supporting sustainable fisheries management and the reduction of plastic waste generated by the fishing industry within the context of the Blue Economy. Furthermore, the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for biodiversity conservation reflects UNDP Pacific's commitment to safeguarding marine ecosystems from the threats posed by plastic pollution.

UNDP Pacific's engagement extends to policy advocacy and legislation support, assisting Pacific governments in crafting and enforcing policies and regulations, the container deposit legislation. Through innovation challenges, UNDP Pacific fosters a culture of innovation, encouraging local entrepreneurs and inventors to develop creative solutions to combat plastic pollution. Lastly, through community outreach and awareness campaigns, UNDP Pacific actively engages with local communities, promoting responsible plastic use and conducting clean-up drives to mitigate the impact of plastic pollution on the Pacific environment. Together, these initiatives showcase a comprehensive and collaborative approach to building a cleaner, more sustainable, and plastic-free future for the Pacific region.

This workshop's approach is multifaceted, beginning with informal policy dialogues, or Talanoa as we call it in the Pacific, to addressing concepts, challenges, and opportunities related to plastic pollution. It then proceeds to technical sessions that delve deeper into utilizing the ocean and circular economy as tools against plastic pollution, featuring comparative country cases from both the Pacific and other regions. These sessions share diverse experiences in combatting plastic pollution and acquiring various sources of financing.

This workshop, in collaboration with the UNDP and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, brings together key global partners to foster knowledge exchange on plastic pollution. It emphasizes adaptability regarding evolving developments in plastics, notably the upcoming 2024 global plastics treaty negotiations. Our endeavors align with global recommendations, such as those from the 4th United Nations Oceans Forum and aim to ensure active engagement and coherent policy representation in these discussions. Ultimately, our mission transcends addressing plastic pollution; it's about harnessing challenges to create a sustainable, resilient, and prosperous future through innovation and collaboration for the Pacific region and the world.

I am filled with optimism as I look around this room at the diverse, passionate, and committed individuals and nations that make up our Pacific community. Together, we can be the change-makers, the innovators, and the leaders who transform our shared vision into reality.

Let us approach this workshop with an open heart and an open mind, ready to learn, share, and collaborate. Together, we can pave the way for a cleaner, more sustainable, and prosperous future for our Pacific home.

Vinaka vaka levu (Thank you very much).