

Early childhood meet kicks off

By PETER KORUGL

A SEMINAR starts today in Port Moresby that brings together government officials and experts from universities, non-governmental organisations, and United Nations agencies to review and assess early childhood development (ECD) policies and standards in the Pacific.

The outcome of the seminar, among other things, will lay the foundation for Papua New Guinea to realise the goals of its Vision 2050, recently launched by the Government.

The seminar will also initiate regional partnerships among countries in the Pacific to how best the region can develop its young. From zero to eight years old before they start formal education.

The regional seminar serves as a platform for participating countries to share specific aspects of their policy work, and also gain feedback and insights from other countries and experts on aspects of evidence-based policy development and implementation.

"The seminar is a sharing of experiences, to develop networking among the participating countries and people in community development. We have to develop a holistic approval to address this concern. PNG is not far behind the others ... and for PNG, it is important because the outcomes will lay the foundation to achieving the aims of the Vision 2050," Dr Bertrand Desmonlins, PNG country representative of UNICEF said.

He said PNG children must be developed very early for them to

make sense of the world around them and this encompasses health, education, parenting and a whole range of issues.

The seminar aims to tackle prevalent issues in the Pacific, such as the inclusion of most vulnerable children in policies, provision of ECD programs for children under three, and strengthen co-ordination through networks to ensure that holistic national policies are developed. The seminar is organised by Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and hosted by PNG through the Department of Community Development and supported by UNICEF and UNESCO.

"The seminar offers an excellent window of opportunity to look at the early childhood and development issue. It brings together people committed to the same issue, all sectors working together in an integrated approach to deal with the issue," Professor Jacqueline Hayden from the Early Childhood Development and Education Department of Macquarie University, Australia, said. The seminar comes three years after a regional early childhood care and education workshop held in the Solomon Islands in March 2007, which first examined developing national policies to include care and education for young children from birth to eight years old so that they are well prepared to enter the formal education system.

Since then the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have both incorporated early childhood education officially within their basic education.

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