

Background

The Cook Islands Education Support Programme (ESP) began in 1989 when the Cook Islands government assumed responsibility for recruiting New Zealand teachers to fill teaching positions in several Cook Island secondary schools. Toward the end of the 1990s, a series of New Zealand-based Management Services Consultants (MSCs) were appointed to lead the recruitment process from New Zealand. By 2001, the practice of recruiting curriculum developers and advisors as well as secondary teachers was widespread. In 2004, the Cook Islands Ministry of Education (CIMO) re-assumed full and direct responsibility for recruiting from New Zealand.

In 2005 and 2006, all other New Zealand assisted education projects came under the ESP funding umbrella. This included programmes and projects designed to improve the quality of primary and secondary education, improve access to and the quality of teacher education and teaching resources, improve the inclusion of and learning of special needs students in the education system, assist with the ongoing development of Cook Islands curricula and strengthen educational management.

The review was undertaken with the understanding that the ESP would not be continued as a sector wide approach was under development. This sector wide approach would have the NZAID and AusAID joint programme supporting the new joint Strategic Plan of CIMOE and Department of National Human Resource Development and implemented directly by these agencies.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the review was to contribute towards setting the future direction for New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) / Australia Agency for International Development (AusAID) support to the education sector within the context of the Learning for Life Strategic Plan, which is based on the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan for 2006-2010.

The objective was to ascertain the effectiveness of selected NZAID/AusAID contributions to the education sector in the Cook Islands in the period 2001-2006 in relation to improving the quality of education and focusing on what has been achieved, successes and failures, and lessons to take forward.

The key questions were:

- what has been achieved through the NZAID/AusAID contributions? How have the programmes and activities under review improved the quality of teaching and learning in the Cook Islands?
- what has worked well and less well? What variables might have affected success?
- what difference has been made? What value seems to have been added to the Cook Islands education sector by NZAID/AusAID support to CIMOE since 2001?
- what lessons from the apparent successes and problems can inform future support?

Main Findings

The Review found sound fiscal management and reasonable employment conditions for New Zealand advisors, facilitators and teachers occurred during implementation. What is going well with respect to results included:

- most expected outputs were met
- positive attitudes expressed by education personnel
- the use of the ESP as the umbrella for all NZAID/AUSAID-funded education activities has laid a foundation for a sector-wide approach (SWAp)
- ESP-related goals and activities are linked to the Learning for Life strategic plan for Cook Islands education
- implementing the ESP is advancing the goal of localisation and ownership of education development by the CIMOE
- there has been a change of advisory focus from emphasis on curriculum to emphasis on pedagogy
- male and female teachers are involved equitably in ESP activities and that male and female students are benefiting equitably.

Challenges and areas requiring further development:

- Moving to a sector wide approach by prioritizing and budgeting activities based on the Learning for Life strategic plan for education and ensuring that
- activities are linked to needs.
- Enhancing monitoring and reporting processes.
- Demonstrating that recruitment of New Zealand teachers improves student achievement.
- Localising the curriculum advisory service by encouraging New Zealand appointed advisors and facilitators in the Curriculum Advisory Unit (CAU) to
- work alongside local counterparts.
- Providing professional support for CAU advisors and facilitators.
- Enhancing Te Reo Maori resources.
- Ensuring equity of learning opportunities in the outer islands.
- Inequitable remuneration of local versus New Zealand advisors, facilitators and teachers remains an issue, with negative outcomes for teachers and students in some cases.
- Processes and procedures for recruiting, appointing and supporting educators from New Zealand are a major challenge for CIMOE. Procedures should be revised, accepted, documented and transparent.
- Falling student rolls imply fewer teachers needed over time, perhaps a narrower range of subject choices, merging or closing some schools to be replaced by flexible/distance learning.
- Prioritised changes are needed urgently, but need to be made carefully and with thought.

Recommendations—for immediate attention:

- CIMOE to report in a more evidence-based manner than previously, using analysed quantitative data relating to the short and long term impact of ESP activities on teacher performance or student achievement
- the Learning for Life strategic plan should be adjusted to signal qualitative and quantitative mechanisms for progress measurement
- CIMOE (Department of Audit and Quality Assurance) to strengthen monitoring and reporting processes in relation to long and short-term goals, including collection of baseline data

- CIMOE to check, refine, strengthen and document current process and procedures for recruiting, appointing and supporting New Zealand advisors, facilitators and teachers in a transparent manner
- CIMOE to develop a set of dialect readers in Te Teo Maori as planned
- CIMOE to complete development of the Learning for Life strategic plan, including prioritizing and costing activities.

Recommendations – for long term attention:

- CIMOE to explore ways to investigate whether ESP-sponsored secondary teachers are making a difference to student achievement
- Ensure local appointments made to match ESP-sponsored advisory appointments to the CAU
- CIMOE to strengthen and extend support provided to CAU advisors and facilitators, mainly by sharing existing expertise in the CAU
- CIMOE to investigate and act upon ways to ensure equity of opportunity for outer island students
- Key operations of the ESP continue to be promoted and sponsored by NZAID and AusAID until they are incorporated into the sector-wide approach, at which point the CIMOE will be able to make more generic approaches to donors.

Key Issues and Learning for NZAID

Long Term Strategic Planning

The trend toward falling student rolls need to be monitored, and the implications and options considered.

Enhancing Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Processes

Current monitoring and reporting focuses primarily on actions undertaken, making it difficult to evaluate what difference the ESP has made. Improved monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes would add value to the evolving sector-wide approach to education in the Cook Islands. Good practice examples such as the Numeracy Project could be built upon and raises the importance of identifying partner capacity for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities.

Localisation

More use of local advisors and counterparts, and leadership training for local teachers contributes to localisation and building ownership of education development by the CIMOE. Inequitable remuneration of local versus New Zealand advisors, facilitators and teachers remains an issue. Processes and procedures for recruiting, appointing and supporting educators from New Zealand are a major challenge for CIMOE.

Follow-up

Most of the recommendations were for the Cook Islands' government. NZAID agrees that finishing development of the Learning for Life Strategic Plan is essential for the development of an education SWAp. NZAID intends to emphasise M&E and to provide support for technical assistance and/or the development of SWAp-related information management

systems. The Agency sees merit in rethinking the advisor system given the reality of falling school rolls and relatively low levels of government support to education. NZAID is keen to support CIMOE in continuing to investigate and act upon ways of ensuring equity of learning opportunities for students on the outer islands as part of its poverty elimination focus. In moving to a SWAP, NZAID wishes to support and contribute to CIGov funding of agreed priorities.

To request a copy of the full report email aidevaluation@mfat.govt.nz and quote the reference number - Eva0708.