

## **Background**

The Pacific region population is growing at 3.2 percent annually, putting pressure on social services. Median age is 21 years. Young people lack basic skills needed to work in the formal sector and school systems are often authoritarian. NZAID has funded the Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB) since 2003. The first Grant Funding Arrangement (GFA) for 2003-06 aimed to “increase the use of innovative teaching methods to stimulate self-expression and debate of key development issues, both in formal and non-formal education”. This was extended until 2011 with the goal of “making use of student-centred learning techniques an integral part of the education system in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji”. Wan Smolbag’s Pacific Regional Project has developed educational materials on key development issues, and techniques for their delivery. It has also trained and supported educators in their use.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The Review was intended to assess the impact of the project and to draw conclusions on key project successes and challenges to date, so that lessons learned can be integrated into future programme development, improvement and expansion. NZAID intends using the findings to guide decision-making around future inputs into regional educational initiatives in the Pacific. The objectives were to:

1. Evaluate the impact of project interventions and delivery of outputs in terms of the project goal
2. Assess the extent to which project outputs and indicators, benefits and beneficiaries outlined in the GFA were achieved
3. Draw conclusions regarding the appropriateness of the original project design, resources and structures; key project successes and challenges and analyse progress made as a result of these. Make recommendations to NZAID/WSB to optimise quality and impact.

## **Main Findings**

Process and methods: where the WSB core group works directly with communities, its initial approach is to send researchers with the task of making an assessment of the best issues to begin working on and how, when and with whom that work should be undertaken. This creates sound foundation for an ongoing relationship. For much of WSB’s work, contact with a community or institution is established by means of attracting one or two of its members into a WSB education or training activity. The impact of the development work that they carry out in their communities is difficult to assess, often because of the sheer isolation of their communities, however, there is a strong multiplier effect in action, and this study found in most of them, an high degree of commitment, enthusiasm, awareness and overall competence.

WSB works on many important areas of development that are inherently sensitive and controversial. A focus on gender roles, violence, sex or reproduction, for example, can be perceived to run counter to important traditional values. Almost every educator interviewed spoke very highly about WSB materials and training on these ‘sensitive issues’. It is reasonable to conclude that the quality of WSB materials and training is largely a reflection of the methods that give rise to them.

Once an issue is identified and prioritised, the next step will usually be to devise a play on the issue. Based on a draft script, the core group engages in a rigorous process of discussion, critique, workshopping and rewriting. This ensures that all the important considerations are taken into account in the finished product, and is one of the key factors in the success of WSB.

WSB's internal systems are of a high standard. Participant evaluations are routinely used in all WSB activities and the comments contained in them are given consideration. However, the day-to-day demands of planning and implementing such an extensive programme of activities has left little scope for researching the wider impact of their programmes.

WSB progress reports show that educators making use of WSB materials have found them to be of tremendous value. The inventory of materials produced by WSB over the 2003-2006 period shows a lot was achieved without compromising quality. They use language and concepts that are appropriate for populations with low levels of literacy. By successfully pitching the materials at this level, WSB ensures that they can be used in both formal schooling and non-formal education contexts. The audio-visual resources and associated user guides are factually sound, clearly written, contain a good variety of thought-provoking questions and activities that would stimulate discussion, and are designed and produced in an attractive and accessible way. WSB resources form a core part of the curriculum of three courses designed to support and strengthen the delivery of technical and life-skills education by NGOs, a key aim of the framework. The materials are also appreciated by the private sector.

With respect to what is going less well, criticisms and suggestions for how to improve WBS resources were difficult to find. Feedback fell into four categories:

- Requests for even more materials
- Discomfort with subject matter, specifically access to condoms causing promiscuity (a common perception, despite being demonstrably incorrect)
- A few senior educators felt WSB's gender agenda had become too dominant and posed an obstacle for men being receptive to other educational topics, however there was very little support for this criticism in subsequent interviews with teachers in Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomons.
- Development of materials in closer consultation with Ministry of Education was suggested in a few meetings as a way of making the relevance to curriculum clearer to teachers. But whenever this concern was raised other teachers replied that it was not difficult to work out how the materials could fit the curriculum, and tying the materials too closely to school curriculums would slow development of materials and make them less useful in non-formal contexts.

WSB training materials on their own are insufficient—training in their use is needed. WSB training for trainers is of high standard with participants motivated, enthused and equipped with a range of educational methods. Demand for training is high. Enthusiasm is maintained afterwards. WSB has trained 606 teachers and 633 NGO leaders during the first two years of the programme.

In its regionalisation effort WSB has drawn on the approach to building relationships that has been successful in Vanuatu. Key people in Fiji (1) and Solomons (2) were identified as counterpart trainers to take the Vanuatu experience to these countries from 2003, working in

collaboration with NGOs. They underwent intensive training in Vanuatu in WSB education and methods. Expansion into Solomons has not been easy and some dissatisfaction with WSB was expressed by the Solomon Islands Development Trust, but this was not consistent with comments from other NGO actors and teachers. Uncompleted programme components:

- Desktop publishing equipment is in place by the person trained to operate it (graphic design and publishing) left, and it will be difficult to find a replacement in Vanuatu.
- Exchanges with other community theatre/education practitioners to stimulate creativity
- Manual on producing student centred educational materials – replaced by a video, of high quality.

### *Recommendations*

1. NZAID should continue core funding to WSB, including for regionalisation
2. WSB should give high priority to recruit and retain staff for to sustain its capacity for production of high quality publications
3. WSB should develop a close relationship with Solomon Islands College of Higher Education in a similar manner to Vanuatu Teacher Training College, in the context of NZAID's sector-wide education approach
4. NZAID to facilitate WSB involvement in the Solomon Island national Education Action Plan, especially for teacher education.
5. A feasibility study for a Francophone programme within WSB should be conducted
6. The need identified by WSB for external training to stimulate ideas and creativity could be met through exchanges with similar groups in other developing countries.

### **Key Issues and Learning for NZAID**

**Regionalisation:** some factors that will influence successful regionalisation of WSB's programme were identified by the Review, including more effort in relationship building with the formal education sectors and sufficient capacity to produce high quality resources.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** presently WSB routinely carries out participant evaluations of all its activities and the feedback from these are given consideration. The day-to-day demands of planning and implementing an extensive and growing programme of activities leave little scope for WSB to monitor and evaluate wider outcomes and impact. The issue arises of how WSB can be supported to develop and resource an appropriately balanced monitoring and evaluation framework and systems that will serve its information and organisational learning needs during the regionalisation phase.

**Relationship with NZAID:** the rate of turnover of NZAID staff with responsibility for managing the relationship with WSB has caused some frustration.

### **Follow-up**

NZAID's response to the recommendations:

1. Noted, but this is outside the scope of the Review. NZAID committed until 2011 and is unable to commit further. Additional support will depend upon the framework for the Regional Education Programme to be developed in 2008.

2. Agree. Recruitment in parallel with a VSA volunteer, and possible outsourcing of highly technical elements if the counterpart is not competent in all areas.
3. Agree. Necessary for sustainable integrated results. WSB committed to this. The relationship with Vanuatu Teacher Training College also needs to be formalized.
4. Agree, but capacity of post in Honiara to support is limited and feasibility of involvement with the formal sector is not yet clear.
5. Disagree. French embassy may provide funds for translation of materials, but funds for training are also essential and cannot be provided by NZAID
6. Disagree. WSB is at top of their field in the Pacific, so exchanges would need to be further a-field, and are not seen by WSB as high priority. Strategic feedback on publications from a curriculum writer in New Zealand (or the Pacific) is preferable.

In addition to considering the recommendations, NZAID has discussed possible strategic directions with WSB. Key points included:

- Further regionalisation requires fundamental changes in the organisational structure in Vanuatu and an appropriate in-country management structure.
- Further expansion will require greater commitment on the part of WSB to integration of its resources into the national curricula and of its teaching methods into pre and in-service teacher training. Appropriate strategies for engagement with the formal education sector will also be required. NZAID can play a limited role in helping to link WSB into emerging sector-wide approaches.
- Outside the formal education sector WSB are well placed to support health and other initiatives.

To request a copy of the full report email [aidevaluation@mfat.govt.nz](mailto:aidevaluation@mfat.govt.nz) and quote the reference number - Eva0712