

AQEP END OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Acronyms

AMU	Assets and Monitoring Unit
AQEP	Access to Quality Education Program
AUD	Australian Dollar
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
DEO	District Education Office
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIS	Disability Inclusive Schools
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EGMA	Early Grade Maths Assessment
ESSDP	Education Sector Strategic Development Plan
EOPO	End of Program Outcomes
FEG	Free Education Grant
FENC	Foundation for the Education of Needy Children
FEMIS	Fiji Education Management Information System
FJD	Fijian Dollar
FRIEND	Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprise and Development
FNDP	Fiji National Development Plan
FTA	Fijian Teachers' Association
HT	Head Teacher
IT	Information Technology
LANA	Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
MoE	Ministry of Economy
MEHA	Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
PS	Permanent Secretary
SBM	School Based Management
SIMS	School Information System
SMC	School Management Committee
SWD	Students with a Disability
TA	Technical Assistance
TC	Tropical Cyclone
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the end of program evaluation was to determine if the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) achieved its end of program objectives of improved access to education, improved quality of education, and sustainable adoption of AQEP approaches and principles.

The core part of Australia's recent investment to support the Fiji Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) through AQEP, worth AUD 43.3 million was delivered over six years from 15 August 2011 to 30 June 2017. The Program trialed a school based management approach to lift attendance and learning outcomes in 85 targeted primary schools, including five disability inclusive schools. Further funding of AUD 16.3 million (and a contract extension to 31 December 2018) was approved for AQEP to rebuild 18 Fijian schools following the February 2016 Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston. In April 2017, the AQEP contract was further amended to include an additional AUD 1.5 million to take over health sector reconstruction, following the completion of the DFAT-funded Fiji Health Sector Support Program (FHSSP).

KEY FINDINGS

AQEP supported a total of 222 schools and 45,927 students through all of its activities over the life of the Program. The Program has been a general success. The Program as a whole was highly relevant, responding to needs in all key areas of work across the three components. It was generally effective across all program components. Despite challenges associated with contextual change in both the Fijian and Australian Government policy and budget, the Program was able to deliver the interventions efficiently within budget. In the area of sustainability, AQEP was generally successful in enabling the MEHA to adopt best practice, for example, the Literacy and Numeracy package now has a budget allocation, supported by dedicated staff.

Improved Access to Education

There were notable advances in new literacy and numeracy strategies, in infrastructure repair, and data management through the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) introduced in 2013. Support to disability inclusion has been a promising new area. AQEP's support has led to a growth in awareness regarding disability and how to integrate disability inclusion in a school setting. AQEP's design was also generally appropriate for prevailing conditions during its inception. At that time, a school based management model (SBM) approach allowed for visible, early wins and short-term improvements in critical areas like infrastructure. This was due to AQEP's direct support at the school level. Efforts to boost school and community capacity to address access (social protection) were well-executed, participatory, and inclusive. The attendance rate for AQEP supported schools improved from 85% in 2012 to 91% in Term 1 of 2017. This is slightly higher than the average national attendance rate of 90% in Term 1, 2017. The challenge of school access remains, however. AQEP's intensive support in areas like social protection may not be sustainable in the longer-term; it appears that this remains dependent on AQEP-style external interventions. In general, the quality of school leadership made a big difference in AQEP's impact on quality and access.

Improved Quality of Education

Through intensive coaching and mentoring of teachers, AQEP was able to achieve considerable successes in the areas of improvements to teaching quality. AQEP was responsive to school needs for practical, hands-on training. This was a departure from professional development efforts in the past, with off-site, one off trainings being the norm. AQEP helped fill a significant gap here, which made the Program's response particularly relevant to the identified needs. Literacy and numeracy teaching

strategies appear to have made some positive impact on learning outcomes. For example, in 2015 there were only 24% of Year 4 students in the bottom quartile for literacy down from 35% in 2012. These strategies have been largely adopted by the MEHA.

The infrastructure gap was filled in the short to medium term in selected AQEP supported schools. Visible improvements to classrooms and boarding facilities helped create a better overall learning environment. Longer-term infrastructure demands, such as school-based maintenance and repair remain challenges. Access for students with disabilities was also boosted through the establishment of disability inclusion schools and support through provision of teacher's aides. Improvements to infrastructure at the school level have also raised the profile of targeted schools in the eyes of parents, the school community, teachers, and students. The impact of such concrete improvements has helped give AQEP a general sense of success, and generated overall good-will.

One of the key lessons to emerge from AQEP was how important the issue of quality is to the entire system. Future support should attempt to define and support quality across the board in practical, measurable ways.

Sustainability

AQEP has in a very real sense succeeded in laying important groundwork for future support to the MEHA at the systems level. Gains across literacy, numeracy, disability inclusion, and data management can be consolidated and embedded in a future phase of support, where the focus most likely should transition from a school based management model to one of centralised system support, with a continued line of site to the school level to ensure on-going evidence of sustainability of core areas of external support to MEHA from AQEP.

The school based management (SBM) delivery model was right for AQEP's time. At a time of a more challenging diplomatic and development environment (2010), the model of delivery support at the school level was the right one judging from the evidence. This model has longer-term drawbacks, recognised by most stakeholders. The perception of "AQEP schools" should now properly yield to a more systems based approach, supporting the Ministry and its schools as a whole.

Challenges

AQEP also met with challenges. One such area, as noted above, is the sustainability of an intensive SBM approach and support to "AQEP schools" as opposed to the education sector as a whole. By design AQEP's interventions were largely but not exclusively school based. This was a major strength for producing tangible improvements at that level. However, by supporting 85 schools in a comprehensive way there was always the risk of a parallel, or "AQEP-centric" effect. References to "AQEP schools" (as opposed to Ministry schools) while positive, was a common observation. However, it is noted that it was necessary to have "AQEP schools" not only to set quality benchmarks but also for public diplomacy purposes to identify schools receiving Australian Government support.

The other major challenge was in the area of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The lack of an effective M&E framework from the outset was something AQEP never fully overcame. While the end of program outcomes provided a high-level framework, and there were more detailed indicators in each sub-component, better program management could have been able to capture overall linkages between the three components, and allowed for more effective program adjustment to a more sustainable path over time as evidence accumulated. Accordingly, there is evidence of missed capacity building opportunities to take advantage of changes to the institutional or political context over time. One example regards the Free Education Grant (FEG) changes and the strategic planning needs it

raised at the school level. While AQEP staff were aware of the need to align AQEP grants to FEG planning, in practice large capacity gaps at the school level were observed.

AQEP was also buffeted by several substantial external shocks. These involved DFAT mandated changes early on to a school based management model, to address impacts of disasters such as the 2012 floods and cyclone, and Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016. Despite these external shocks the AQEP program performed admirably. The successive emergencies and the effects of TC Winston highlighted a continuing capacity gap within the area of emergency management and disaster risk reduction for schools. While this end of program evaluation's scope does not include AQEP's role in response or reconstruction, the spectre of future emergencies must be accounted for in future design, and recommendations around disaster risk reduction within the Fijian context will be put forward here.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations Relating to School Level Teaching, Learning, and Management

Recommendation 1: That DFAT support the Literacy and Numeracy program. There is an ongoing need to build upon this training program to meet evolving capacity needs of teachers in key learning areas such as intervention/ remedial strategies, assessment, and analysis of Literacy and Numeracy results. Coordination with other Literacy and Numeracy initiatives e.g. PILNA will be important. Literacy and Numeracy support should also be embedded in any future curriculum review.

Recommendation 2: That a process of co-development be considered for literacy and numeracy support and culturally appropriate reading materials. This would be for future development of literacy and numeracy programs that includes representatives from teacher training institutions, Curriculum Development Unit and District Officers. Coordination with other Literacy and Numeracy initiatives e.g. PILNA will be important. Literacy and Numeracy support should also be embedded in any future curriculum review.

Recommendation 3: DFAT should continue to support the disability inclusion strategy through additional professional development support for classroom teachers, supporting MEHA to investigate the sourcing and training of additional Teacher Aides, and the possibility of accessing expertise from established special schools. Disability inclusion should also be embedded in any future review of pedagogical qualifications, as there are SWD in mainstream schools.

Recommendation 4: School leadership and management qualities make a significant difference to quality and access interventions and need to be supported more explicitly. Future external support to MEHA by DFAT should focus on supporting system wide strategies to boost school leadership and link that leadership to school based (practical), and not theoretical approaches.

Recommendations Relating to Systems (Infrastructure, IT, evidence based policy, learning outcomes)

Recommendation 5. AQEP's infrastructure initiatives, including the MEHA minimum infrastructure standards, need to be reviewed and integrated into the MEHA legal and policy framework with DFAT's support through a short term International Adviser.

Recommendation 6: A baseline audit to assist the Asset and Monitoring Unit (AMU) should be supported by DFAT to provide a reliable baseline of schools' conditions to serve as a basis for future planning.

Recommendation 7: MEHA should help support use of FEMIS transition from a utility-focused approach to a learning focused one with assistance from DFAT where strategies could be developed to help staff value the use of FEMIS data in ways that help support evidence based learning outcomes.

Recommendation 8: Future training for principals and teachers should focus more on using data to improve teaching and learning, management and planning which DFAT should support. It will be important to deliver training that empowers school heads and teachers on how to use FEMIS to manage school operations, and monitor school, teacher and student performance.

Recommendation 9: FEMIS data from Early Childhood Education Centres, Technical Colleges and Higher Education Institutions need to be targeted in the near future by MEHA with support from DFAT. Here, student identifiers can be used to link student longitudinal performance at school, tertiary studies and employment.

II. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Australia's recent investment in the Fiji education sector, the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP), ended in June 2017. Commencing in 2011, AQEP represented an investment of approximately AUD43.3 million to the Fiji education sector. Prior to this, the Australian Government had provided significant support to education in Fiji through the Fiji Education Sector Program (2003 – 2009), followed by a series of interim education projects with UNICEF, UNDP, the Fiji Crippled Children's Society, and the Fiji Society for the Blind (2009 – 2011). The Fiji Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) is committed towards improving quality, access and retention in the education sector through its Vision - 'Quality Education for Change, Peace and Progress'. In pursuit of its Vision, the MEHA has implemented several reforms and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education through greater accountability and performance measures for teachers and school management.

Poverty and geographical disadvantage have been identified as major constraints to education access, with preventing "urban drift" also a key Fiji development objective. Larger Fijian government priority areas concern a civil service reform program to make government more accountable and efficient, and a focus on "e-governance" with effective management of data for policy decision-making. Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are also critical areas, as is disability inclusion, and the education sector is affected by these contextual considerations. Within the education sector more specifically, literacy and numeracy have been areas of high need and focus and are supported as development objectives under DFAT's 2015-2019 Fiji Aid Investment Plan.

AQEP has made considerable progress in literacy and numeracy teaching strategies, with MEHA having adopted AQEP's model for broader roll-out across the primary education sector. While levels of primary school enrolment are high, student retention and completion rates (particularly post-primary) are seen as areas requiring improvement, although AQEP demonstrated some success in boosting student attendance in AQEP supported schools in the short term. The attendance rate for AQEP

supported schools improved from 85% in 2012 to 91% in Term 1 of 2017¹. This is slightly higher than the average national attendance rate of 90% in Term 1, 2017.

Natural disasters also have a significant negative impact on the education sector, as evidenced by Tropical Cyclone Winston in February 2016. Approximately half of all schools in Fiji (495) were affected by TC Winston with damage to school infrastructure, furniture and equipment, and educational resources. Damage to the education sector was estimated at AUD50 million, and the cost to ‘build back better’ the schools damaged was estimated at AUD250 million. Forty-three per cent of Fiji’s students are enrolled in schools that sustained cyclone damage. Access to schools was affected after the cyclone, with reports of significant drops in attendance following the disaster and incidences of psychosocial trauma among affected students and teachers. Although most children have returned to school, the impact of TC Winston may have adversely affected learning outcomes – time will tell.

The Australian Government remains committed to continued partnership with the Fiji Government to support education in Fiji and is embarking on the design of the next phase of education support post-AQEP. AQEP has made several important gains detailed in this end of program evaluation (EPE). These gains can be consolidated and built upon in the next phase of assistance, with critical considerations in sustaining gains at the system level.

The Australian Government’s provision of support to the Fiji education sector has helped provide a solid foundation for future investment. AQEP, in particular, has made gains in areas targeted under DFAT’s Fiji Aid Investment Plan, with one of its core framework objectives on “improved human development” and focusing on the poor, disadvantaged, marginalised, and disabled populations. The goal of AQEP was to work in conjunction with the Ministry of Education (MEHA) and other relevant stakeholders (including education and disability stakeholders) to improve the ability of children from very poor communities, including those with disabilities, to access a quality school education. The EPE will help inform the design of the next phase of education assistance, documenting the lessons learned and possible ways forward.

III. POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR EDUCATION

Fiji’s education system continues to develop from a larger development context characterised by poverty, geographic isolation, rural-urban drift, and slow economic growth. Fiji is now an upper-middle-income country according to the World Bank² (2017: 8) and ‘has one of the most sophisticated economies’ in the Pacific region. Extreme poverty is rare in Fiji with 2.3% of the population in this category according to the World Bank’s measure of poverty (less than US\$1.40 a day) and another 15.1% live in poverty (less than US\$3.10 a day) which is ‘among the lowest rates in the Pacific but similar to those in other upper-middle-income countries’ (World Bank, 2017: 8)³. This compares to national estimates of 2.5% of the population living below the food poverty line (equivalent to extreme poverty in Fiji) and 34% live below the national basic needs poverty line.

Fiji’s government institutions are more developed and have a larger capacity baseline than most developing Pacific Island states. With relatively strong institutions to build on to deliver fast growth (such as a disciplined and well-educated civil service, payment of 80% of its spending out of tax

¹ Source. Access to Quality Education Program. 2017. *AQEP Attendance Report, Term 1 2017*.

² World Bank Group. 2017. *Republic of Fiji: Systematic Country Diagnostic*. P160757 June 12, 2017.

³ World Bank Group. 2017. *Republic of Fiji: Systematic Country Diagnostic*. P160757 June 12, 2017.

revenue, recruitment and payment of domestic and international experts on performance contracts without donor support, political stability and control of corruption), Fiji can ‘develop and put in place significant reforms quickly when necessary, and adopt appropriate policies for the country’ (World Bank, 2017: 8)⁴. The Ministry of Economy plays a key role in driving Fiji’s development agenda. The 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan 2017 -2036⁵ with the theme ‘Transforming Fiji’ was launched on 14th November 2017 at the COP23 meeting in Bonn, Germany by the Chair, Fiji’s Prime Minister, Hon. Frank Bainimarama⁶. Bainimarama emphasised that Fiji’s development plan was launched internationally to draw attention to global warming and the threat of climate change as fundamental factors that helped define Fiji’s priorities with adaption, resilience and mitigation forming the core of Fiji’s development plans. In relation to education, Bainimarama noted ‘a world-class skilled workforce to drive economic growth by investing in our teachers, modernising our schools and maintaining universal access for all levels of education, including early childhood, vocational and higher education’ was a critical pathway to follow.

A national priority includes a Civil Service Reform agenda designed to increase the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the civil service. Other key priorities include a shift to more evidence based policy making through “e-governance” and rationalising data management at both the ministry level and across government. Adaptation to climate change and disaster risk reduction are also key areas, especially in the wake of the 2016 Tropical Cyclone Winston and other natural disasters. In 2017 Fiji ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The 2015-2018 Education Sector Strategic Development Plan (ESSDP) continues to be the overarching governing policy document for the Ministry of Education. The Special and Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Plan 2017 – 2020 provides the blueprint for addressing the needs of children with disabilities.

The education system continues to face challenges in providing access to education and delivering quality teaching to all of its regions. Some of the key points from the Fiji Education Sector Situational Analysis in 2015⁷ and the 2017 Fiji Systematic Country Diagnostic by the World Bank include:

- There are 241,620 children between the ages of 4-18
- 52% of that total figure are in primary school (aged 6-13 years), 32% at secondary (14-18 years) and 16% at preschool (4-5 years)
- Fiji enjoys almost universal primary education with the net primary enrolment rate of 96.8% well above the Pacific average of 86.4%; the net enrolment rate in secondary education is 80.3%, the highest in the Pacific
- Approximately 3.2% of primary age children and 19.7% of secondary age children are not in school
- Barriers to access include remoteness, limited and costly transport, increased infrastructure costs, and small class sizes

⁴ World Bank Group. 2017. *Republic of Fiji: Systematic Country Diagnostic*. P160757 June 12, 2017.

⁵ Fiji Ministry of Economy. 2017. *5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan*. September 2017.

⁶ Hon PM Bainimarama Speech at Official Launch Of Fiji’s 5-Year And 20-Year National Development Plan 2017-2036 at <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Speeches/HON-PM-BAINIMARAMA-SPEECH-AT-OFFICIAL-LAUNCH-OF-FI.aspx>.

⁷ Cassity, Elizabeth and Jones, Amir. 2015. *Fiji Education Sector Situational Analysis*. ERF 11127: Final, 17 April 2015.

- Teacher quality and methods remain an issue, with teachers facing multi-grade classrooms, poor or inadequate housing, and limited access to higher quality and contextualised learning materials
- Literacy and numeracy needs remain foundational issues
- Environmental and infrastructure challenges with cyclones and flooding.
- Parental views on education and the importance of education – those parents that valued education, irrespective of their level of education, supported the educational needs of their children.

Key education reforms have been implemented across the system since 2015, with one critical shift to make available grants to schools based on enrolment numbers, and delink from the previous poverty indexing scheme (Disadvantaged Schools Index). This is known as the Free Education Grant (FEG) – an average per student of between FJD175 to FJD250 per annum. A baseline grant amount has been established to account for very small rural enrolments, but the FEG itself does not, in general, attempt to address the larger equity issue across the system. The key reform areas are:

- Free Education Grant (FEG)
- Free textbook scheme
- Subsidised transport scheme (free bus fare)
- Elimination of school fees
- School feeding program for kindergarten and Year One students (consisting of milk and cereals in the morning)
- MEHA initiatives in financial management training, external school review inspection teams, professional development workshops for teachers, attempts to reduce student-teacher ratios, additional allowances for rural teachers, and new regulations on school fund raising

Another key contextual factor was the high turnover rate of teaching staff and head teachers at schools (which may result from retirement, resignation and transfers). Data from the case study analysis (AQEP: 2017)⁸ indicates that there were new Head Teachers in 34% of the 85 AQEP supported schools with 22% teacher turnover rate in 2015 and 33% in Term 1, 2016. While MEHA policies exist to govern placement and movement of staff, in practice there is competition for favoured positions in more urban areas or less remote settings. Few of the schools visited during the evaluation had head teachers who had been present during the entire AQEP period. School Management Committees (SMCs) play a strong role, with school managers generally providing a level of administrative continuity. SMCs are, however, limited in their capacities and are still generally male dominated.

A final contextual note concerns observations made in the course of the EPE. While remote and rural schools are generally thought to suffer due to access to resource issues and overall remoteness, the rural schools and communities of which they were a part were generally more cohesive and resilient than the urban areas visited. Rural schools indicated strong connections to the surrounding communities, while urban school staff said that linkages between schools and the urban communities were less cohesive.

⁸ Access to Quality Education Program. 2017. *AQEP School Case Studies: Comparative Analysis. Final Report*. 18 April 2017.

IV. AQEP PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The evaluation investigated AQEP's structure, goals and outcomes. The Theory of Change developed in 2014 is included in Annex 10.

AQEP Goal and End of Program Outcomes

In conjunction with the Ministry of Education (MEHA) and other relevant stakeholders, the Goal of AQEP was:

To improve the ability of children from very poor communities, including those with a disability, to access a quality school education.

AQEP's End of Program Outcomes were:

Improved access to education for children from poor communities with a reduction in disparities based on location, disability and gender

Improved quality of education for children from poor communities with a reduction in disparities based on location, disability and gender

Sustainable adoption of AQEP approaches and principles at school, district and MEHA level to improve access and quality for children from poor communities, including children with disability.

Implementation Architecture

The implementation architecture for the overall achievement of the AQEP goal comprised three discrete but inter-related components. In addition, AQEP included a work stream of emergency response activities but these activities were largely out of the scope of the evaluation. Emergency management was considered from a cross-cutting perspective in the evaluation.

Component 1:	Social Protection
Component 2:	Infrastructure
Component 3:	Building Education Support Structures and Systems
Additional work stream:	Emergency response

Component 1: Agreement was not reached on the specific focus and delivery modality for Component 1 until March 2013. The approach was anchored in school based management (SBM) including access and equity grant funding to specific targeted schools. While the implementation of the inclusion strategy for the education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools was situated under Component 1, disability inclusion was integrated across the Program as a cross cutting theme as well.

Component 2 was focused on upgrading physical infrastructure in the targeted schools to improve the physical learning environment. In addition, there was an additional agreed outcome to improve the infrastructure to allow for increased access for students with disabilities in mainstream schools.

Component 3 was a demand driven and flexible work stream that allowed AQEP to: i) respond to specific requests from MEHA for assistance with specific interventions; and ii) support a journey towards more evidence based planning and policy making. The specific activities under Component 3 were determined each year as part of the annual planning process.

Emergency Response: While not a formal contractual component, responding to educational needs arising from physical emergencies (such as floods and cyclones) was also a key part of AQEP and in Phase One infrastructure support using AQEP funding was provided to 67 schools. Some further support was provided to seven schools in Year 1 of Phase 2 through TC Evans emergency assistance with 538 student beneficiaries (287 boys; 251 girls)⁹.

Targeting of schools

AQEP was designed to focus on access to schooling of the poorest of the poor. Up to 25% of primary schools selected for the Program were those that were deemed most disadvantaged (on a poverty ranking). Equity of targeting was ensured through balancing investments across MEHA school location categories (28% urban, 18% rural, 30% remote, and 24% very remote). The first group of 54 schools selected (in April 2013) was Cohort A. This represented the most disadvantaged group of schools on the poverty incidence assessments. A second group of schools – Cohort B – was originally expected to be approved in late 2013 but the need for AQEP to find budget savings in FY 2013/14 and the need to realign some of AQEP’s work more clearly to MEHA priorities resulted in delays in the development and approval of the targeting strategy for the new cohort. Cohort B, which included up to 31 schools, was approved by AQEP’s Program Coordination Committee in March 2014. A third Cohort C of remote and very remote schools was also selected (up to 30 schools) where AQEP provided infrastructure upgrading only.

The five Disability Inclusion schools were: Adi Maopa, Arya Samaj, Ratu Latianara, South Taveuni, Tavua District.

V. EVALUATION PROCESS AND PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the End of Program Evaluation (EPE) was to:

- evaluate the extent to which the Fiji Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) has achieved its end-of-program outcomes;
- assess the effectiveness of program implementation and the relevance of program interventions;
- compile lessons learnt; and
- provide recommendations that will inform and shape DFAT’s future engagement with the Fiji Government through the Ministry of Education.

Note: The scope of the EPE covered the three AQEP program components but not Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston infrastructure. It also considered how AQEP has contributed to preparing for and responding to natural disasters in the education sector. A separate evaluation of Australia’s humanitarian

⁹ Access to Quality Education Program. 2015 Sixth Six-Monthly Report 1st January – June 2015, July 2015.

investments in the education sector following TC Winston¹⁰ (including AQEP's emergency response activities) was conducted over December 2016 to March 2017.

The EPE independently assessed relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of AQEP activities, with a specific cross cutting focus on:

- *Capacity building approaches*
- *Management effectiveness*
- *Stakeholder engagement and cooperation*
- *Monitoring and evaluation*
- *Analysis and learning; and*
- *Cross-cutting issues such as disability, gender and emergency response.*

Process

The evaluation team adopted a utilisation-focused approach for the evaluation and ensured interviews, consultations and discussions were facilitated and planned in a participatory manner. The approach was primarily qualitative but with key quantitative data such as the LANA analyses, FEMIS data, the comparative studies, AQEP commissioned surveys/research, and budget information. Key aspects of the methodology include:

- Desktop review of documentation, including: DFAT's Fiji Aid Investment Plan, AQEP work products (plans, strategies, evaluations, M&E documents, infrastructure tender and contracts), Fiji Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) 2015 – 2018 Education Sector Strategic Development Plan and relevant Fijian government governing frameworks, sector-wide situational reviews and relevant World Bank studies. DFAT's TC Winston Education Sector Response Evaluation was also consulted.
- Interviews with internal and external stakeholders: DFAT, AQEP (Palladium) Government of Fiji, MEHA, the disability sector, teacher colleges such as Fiji National University, schools and school communities.
- Fieldwork in Fiji, which included stakeholder interviews and guided a detailed beneficiary analysis, involving focus group discussions with communities including at least one in a remote location. Direct inspection of the finished infrastructure work at selected school sites (10 in total).
- Data analysis and synthesis of findings into an end of program evaluation report aligned to DFAT standards for evaluation reports

Interviews were open-ended and semi-structured in nature. An interview guide was prepared and used. The evaluation applied a *purposive sampling* approach whereby stakeholders and schools were selected from pre-defined locations that offered a variety of insights and information. Key informants interviewed included: DFAT, AQEP, selected AQEP cohort A schools and associated school communities, MEHA and the Ministry of Economy, disabled persons organisations and sector advocacy groups. Consultations primarily involved a group interview methodology and, where appropriate and relevant, a focus group/"town-hall" methodology, which was employed in one instance concerning AQEP and non-AQEP literacy and numeracy coaches. Field notes and findings

¹⁰ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2017. *Tropical Cyclone Winston Education Response Evaluation*. October 2017: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/fiji-tc-winston-education-response-evaluation.aspx>.

were consolidated and summarised at the end of each day to identify emerging key themes and issues.

For data processing and analysis team members reviewed the responses to the interview questions and developed a simple ranking framework to assist in developing findings. Findings were then consolidated and peer reviewed through internal team discussions to ensure all the key points were adequately and properly addressed. In these discussions, facilitated by the Team Leader, the team identified topics that were evidence based.

Importantly, the evaluation team ensured flexibility was built in to the evaluation as follows:

- While the overall evaluation mission schedule was prepared prior to the commencement of the in-country mission, the team also responded to emerging issues and changing circumstances and, in some cases, visit schedules were adjusted.
- The detailed questions were structured, but the team also adjusted questions to follow up and drill down on unexpected issues (issues that emerged during the interviews).
- Interviews and group discussions were structured to complete in an hour, which was considered adequate to discuss questions without repetition. In some cases, interviews went beyond the indicative one-hour schedule and were continued upon mutual agreement with willing informants. In the case of group discussions, additional time was provided to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to express their views. A number of follow up visits were conducted to observe teacher practice in classrooms and gather input from teachers, specifically around training and resources.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

All evaluations are imperfect snapshots in time and subject to contextual limitations. Among the more significant limiting factors were:

- The evaluation was not able to adequately assess the efficiency of AQEP implementation given that i) the monitoring and evaluation framework was not set up to collect data around implementation efficiency; and ii) there is a lack of ‘baseline’ data against which to assess the efficiency of AQEP implementation i.e. no similar Education program implemented in a similar context against which to draw conclusions of efficiency in terms of budget, timelines and outcomes achieved. Apart from a Technical Advisory Group review and a Mid-Term review in 2012, there were no other external assessments of program efficiency.
- Interviews conducted in English with some exceptions when local staff accompanied the evaluation team
- Informants may not have effectively distinguished the AQEP independent evaluation team from AQEP program staff despite clear introductions and summaries of purpose. The association with AQEP may have biased responses in favour of AQEP
- Head teachers (HTs) and school management committees (SMCs) made up the bulk of school-based informants with fewer teachers consulted
- MEHA staff turnover is a big factor and in many cases school staff had not been present for the life of the AQEP program. In those cases, efforts were made to interview appropriate informants (teachers or managers) who had an institutional memory or perspective
- The majority of the informants (roughly 60-65%) were male
- The Infrastructure Evaluation specialist noted the “Hawthorne Effect” (commonly defined as the “alteration of behaviour by the subjects of a study due to their awareness of being observed”), which may have had a tendency to conflate infrastructure repair and

improvement's effect on school "mood" with the overall AQEP package of support. In this respect, the evaluation noted limitations in the 2015 Infrastructure Formative Evaluation¹¹:

"there were a number of challenges in implementing the (Hawthorne Effect recommendation). Experience in undertaking M&E had found that school stakeholders had difficulty in assessing relative differences in impact on attendance and learning of even the various tangible AQEP initiatives (infrastructure, school grants, teacher numeracy and literacy training etc.). Whilst doing some research type activity using a controlled school comparison was considered, it would not have been a trivial matter to identify valid control schools given that the AQEP schools were selected as being the most disadvantaged/from very remote locations. After consideration of the methodological challenges, disruption to teaching and learning in the schools, and risk of M&E fatigue amongst teaching staff and stakeholders, the recommendation was not added to the M&E plan.

VII. KEY FINDINGS

The key findings across the three AQEP components are organised under relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. A second section of findings relates to cross-cutting program considerations relating to value for money, management effectiveness, M&E, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, analysis and learning, emergency response, disability and gender. The findings are analysed in order of the program components below as the work streams are distinct though related. Additional supporting data and detail per component can be found in Annexes 7-9.

AQEP Program Components:

Component One: Social Protection (Quality and Access)

Component One was made up of related work streams and initiatives designed to boost both education quality and access to education. The principal activities were:

- Literacy and Numeracy Program
- Social Protection/Access
- Provision of quality teaching and learning materials
- Embedding disability inclusion in five mainstream primary schools.

Component Two: School Infrastructure

Component Two included the following activities designed to boost access and create a better learning environment. Post TC Winston repairs to designated school structures were also included in the response and recovery phase:

- Improved facilities and classrooms
- Disability inclusion infrastructure
- TC Winston repair.

Component Three: Building Education Support Structures and Systems (Ministry Priorities)

- Support to evidence based policy through research support
- Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS).

¹¹ David Week. 2015. *Access to Quality Education Program Component 2: School Infrastructure Formative Evaluation Report*. 16 May 2015.

RELEVANCE

The AQEP program as a whole was highly relevant, responding to needs in all key areas of work across the three components.

Key Program Successes

- **Literacy and Numeracy training filled a significant professional development gap**
- **The Literacy and Numeracy teaching model has been adopted by MEHA and has informed teaching practices**
- **The training programs reflected the MEHA curriculum focus**
- **The training program delivery model fit the working schedules of schools and teachers and built capacity**
- **The disability inclusion program (DIS) provided a practical example to be scaled up in an emerging Fiji policy area**
- **Social protection and awareness programs were inclusive, participatory, and culturally appropriate**
- **Infrastructure upgrades and repairs met local gaps and needs**
- **FEMIS enabled MEHA to use a single database across core service areas**

The most relevant aspects of AQEP were in the areas of literacy and numeracy, disability inclusion, school-based infrastructure upgrades, and the development and adoption of FEMIS as a data management tool that integrated three previously established databases (students, staffing and examinations). The social protection activities were also relevant from a participatory and inclusive point of view.

Literacy and Numeracy

The literacy and numeracy training program filled a significant gap in professional development provision for teachers and saw rates of literacy and numeracy achievement improve. Given the pre-AQEP rates of literacy and numeracy compared to those toward the end of the program (e.g. 2015 – only 24% of Year 4 students in the bottom quartile for literacy down from 35% in 2012)¹², and current research findings around the significant role that teacher quality has on student learning outcomes in this area, it is reasonable to attribute improvement in achievement in these rates, in part to the training program. For further detail regarding the link between improved literacy data and AQEP's interventions please refer to Annex 7.

Teachers recognised the impact of AQEP designed pedagogical practices and training on classroom management and student learning. Teachers expressed strong support for the program in general. There was, however, an observed general weakness regarding regular and strategic monitoring of the use of guides and teaching strategies by Head Teachers. Stronger leadership at the Head Teacher level usually meant that a stronger teacher monitoring regime was in place.

There was significant reliance on AQEP in teaching and learning support activities. Some areas of the MEHA were understaffed or overstretched which may have created an over-reliance on AQEP to fill support or mentoring positions. MEHA senior education officers expressed their gratitude for AQEP's ability to mentor and provide rapid and responsive coaching staff. These regional officers noted their own limited capacities in terms of personnel to undertake a similar role to AQEP. The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) was also noted to have similar limitations which may have prevented them from engaging in literacy and numeracy support at the school level.

¹² Access to Quality Education Program. 2016. *AQEP's 10th Six-Monthly Report, January – June 2016*.

"The Literacy and Numeracy training was easy to understand and follow and I could go back to my classroom after the training and use the activities straight away." (Teacher)

"I learned how to do a proper shared reading and this was something I always wanted to know how to do." (Teacher)

This program was very well received and clearly valued by teachers and filled a gap arising from a recent MEHA policy decision. MEHA had reduced provision of planned and regular cross-sectoral professional development for its teaching workforce. The training in and of itself was deemed very practical by those interviewed. The teaching guides were also well received. They were perceived by head teachers and teachers as having sufficient depth and breadth of content. The Literacy and Numeracy guides also reflected current trends and practices in literacy and numeracy education, replacing some of MEHA's outdated material. While MEHA guides provided teachers a range of sample activities, guidance on literacy and numeracy scaffolding for students was also required to enable students to acquire numeracy and literacy foundational skills. The new AQEP guides addressed this by providing explicit instructions for teachers on how to teach the concepts and model appropriate practices to achieve literacy and numeracy in students.

The entire teaching program clearly reflected the curriculum focus of the MEHA via a cross referencing of learning outcomes in related syllabi. This approach helped the guides and trainings achieve "buy in" from teachers as they could immediately see how the use of the guide related to existing curricular and subject areas. The suggested AQEP daily teaching plans and activities assisted teachers in covering the core curriculum requirements for English and Maths as per MEHA requirements, as opposed to it being viewed as an additional workload.

A key aspect of the success of the training program was the design of the program and guides and the model for workshop delivery. Delivery over a dedicated number of days allowed participants to engage and develop more depth to their understanding. Informants interviewed, mainly teachers, pointed to a perceived gap (particularly more recent graduates) in the quantity and quality of pre-service teaching courses in literacy and numeracy. Teachers felt that the pre-service courses did not connect well to the subsequent training they received from the MEHA. Teachers explained that such training should become part of core curriculum for teacher training institutions. The issue of the quality of pre-service training programs was also clearly an aspect of concern for many senior MEHA officers.

Key Program Lessons

- There was a strong reliance on AQEP coaches and mentors supporting literacy and numeracy, with little existing or new capacity in regional district offices able to deliver similar support
- Use of teaching and learning guides was uneven, but more regular where Head Teacher leadership was stronger
- Teachers and teacher training institutes noted a need for similar AQEP-style Literacy and Numeracy style programs in pre-service training
- An opportunity to develop more culturally sensitive and contextual learning materials may have been missed
- The Inclusive Education Demonstration Schools provided a highly relevant practical environment to advance pedagogy and practice in disability inclusion, highlighting future areas of need and support
- Social protection initiatives helped address the issue of access, but requires wider application beyond individual external interventions to effectively address the needs
- The gap in school based planning was addressed but could have been better aligned to

existing FEG, school annual plans, and 5-year strategic plan processes

- Strong school leadership maximized AQEP planning interventions and helped align them to existing school planning processes
- Elements of the school infrastructure intervention could have been better linked to MEHA policy frameworks and school based planning processes.
- FEMIS' success as a data management tool needs "the human factor" to support data analysis and inform decision-making for a range of better system outcomes

The teacher training institution providers interviewed recognised the value and achievements of the AQEP Literacy and Numeracy training program. They highlighted limited AQEP engagement and involvement of staff from these institutions. This may have been a missed opportunity whereby a stronger engagement could have generated capacity building opportunities and influenced curriculum changes at the training institutes to overcome challenges with the pre-service courses. However, it is noted that support to teacher training institutions was not a part of AQEP's mandate.

Teaching and Learning Resources

The provision of teaching and learning resources for literacy and numeracy met a significant resource gap in schools yet largely failed to create new culturally sensitive and appropriate reading materials. The resources provided in the kits were both relevant and appropriate and supported development of key literacy and mathematical concepts for appropriate ages. On the whole the print materials lacked cultural relevance for students in Fiji. A number of other Pacific Islands have developed and sourced a range of culturally appropriate and sensitive reading materials that reflect best practice in graded readers. Providers from around the Pacific who specialise in readers for Pacific Island children such as Read Pacific could have been sourced. It is acknowledged that following TC Winston funds were spent on replenishing schools with materials. In order to get materials to schools in an expedient manner Sunshine Readers were purchased. However, with a little more investigation, more appropriate commercially produced readers could have been purchased. The evaluation team notes, however, the limitations of the current Fiji market for Fiji-specific materials beyond standard MEHA textbooks. This may explain the presence, across most schools observed, of visual learning materials hanging in classrooms which had been sourced in "Western" countries, with non-Fiji specific themes. There was little evidence that a more strategic, whole-of-program effort was made to emphasise or provide more culturally appropriate materials.

Disability Inclusion

Disability Inclusive Schools and Policy relevance cannot be underestimated. The introduction of the "Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education in Fiji, 2011", along with the AQEP Disability Inclusion Strategy (DIS) provided the catalyst for raising the profile of children with a disability. Fiji has also become a recent (2017) signatory to the United Nations Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. AQEP supported the MEHA in the development of the Special and Inclusive Policy and Implementation Plan 2017-2020. The experiences from the five AQEP inclusive demonstration schools informed the development of this policy and corresponding implementation plan. Based on research on lessons learned from inclusive education¹³ and the transition of children with disability from primary and secondary schools which was turned into a policy paper¹⁴, AQEP also produced five policy

¹³ Caulfield, T., S. Baker and M. Daveta. (2016) 'Lessons learned from inclusive education demonstration schools in Fiji', Access to Quality Education Program, Suva.

¹⁴ AQEP. (2017) 'Strengthening inclusive education in Fiji – Lessons learned from AQEP: Assessment and transition to secondary school for students with disabilities in Fiji', Access to Quality Education Program, Suva.

briefs on disability inclusion: resourcing schools, infrastructure, changing attitudes, assessment and strengthening transition to secondary school, and strengthening teacher training institutions to support inclusive education. AQEP's disability inclusion work was therefore timely and relevant to the current Fijian policy agenda, and its international obligations under the new international treaty.

The Inclusive Education Demonstration Schools provided a highly relevant practical environment to advance pedagogy and practice in disability inclusion. Training provided to teacher aides and teachers was considered relevant and important by those individuals interviewed. The five schools which were supported helped reveal critical future areas for focus in disability inclusion. In particular, there was consistent messaging across informants that more training in the areas of behaviour management and diagnosis was needed. A second critical area involves the need for a skilled pool of trained teacher aides. These aides are currently sourced from local communities, and there is a need for a more uniform process or procedure to help build this base of teacher aides.

The AQEP DIS Formative Evaluation 2015 indicates that, "while some disability inclusion training and ad hoc technical advice has been provided to enhance disability inclusion in Cohorts A and B schools, more systematic support could be provided to ensure the staff working in these schools are confident and skilled in working to increase school participation of children with disabilities. "

Social Protection

The social protection component was inclusive and participatory but possibly less relevant as a tool to boost long term-attendance rates and increase access. The detailed analysis and evidence between social protection and access related issues can be found in Annex 7. The evaluation observed that AQEP's impact on improved attendance rates in AQEP schools may be due more to improvements in infrastructure or better literacy and numeracy gains than on social protection programs. This raises the issue of overall relevance as an activity. The links between social protection activities and improved access are further complicated by MEHA initiatives such as the Free Education Grant (FEG), the elimination of school fees, and subsidised transport. These factors should also be considered when evaluating AQEP's impact on attendance.

There is evidence of positive impacts on school and parental attitudes due to the social protection interventions. Initiatives such as AQEP grant needs planning and execution, mentoring of School Management Committees (SMCs) and Head Teachers (HTs) awareness raising with parents and communities, Mother's clubs, and activity planning for income generation were executed in an efficient way with a very high degree of relevance and inclusiveness in most cases. There was a sustained and concentrated effort to make the grants planning, income generation activities, and awareness raising efforts contextual, understandable, and relevant to the Fiji context. This was one of AQEP's strongest aspects overall, and credit is due to the team and the management of the social protection component.

The AQEP grants implementation and training on use of AQEP grants could have been more relevant had they been better linked to existing FEG grant processes as well as school planning processes. While AQEP program officers indicated the importance of linking AQEP grants with FEG grants and planning processes, there was little evidence that school annual plans were changed in any significant way due to AQEP interventions. In schools where leadership was already strong, however, there was some observed evidence that a better planning mindset had taken root.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure improvements were highly relevant interventions in the areas of improving access to

schooling, creating better quality learning environments, responding to the needs of the disabled, and repairing damage from natural disasters. The 2016 AQEP funded cases studies and the end of program evaluation interviews highlighted informant enthusiasm regarding infrastructure improvements filling a clear and chronic school-level need. Head teachers, teachers, School Management Committees, Mother's Groups, and selected parent/community informants were explicit in linking overall improved school attendance rates and attitudes to school-based infrastructure improvements.

Elements of the school infrastructure intervention could have been better linked to MEHA policy frameworks and school based planning processes. The School Maintenance Manual, for example, was very useful on practical "how-to" maintenance advice. The manual does not adequately address the strategic management of school assets, planning, prioritising and resourcing annual maintenance budgets at the school or system level. There is no capital works strategy and no policy linkage into the MEHA legal framework. Better infrastructure-related reporting systems within FEMIS at the school level were also not addressed, despite an obvious gap there. The current asset accounting and condition reporting for infrastructure in the FEMIS is either too general for use at the system level for understanding school conditions as a whole, or too confusing for school administrators to input data properly into the system.

Many stakeholders noted that to positively impact attendance and learning outcomes, schools need to maintain attractive school buildings, grounds and classrooms to create a positive learning environment (including for children with disability). School building improvement was rated as a highly influential AQEP initiative in both the 2016 case study and the end of program evaluation interviews.

Support to Evidence Based Policy/Ministry Priorities

Component 3 was meant to be a key vehicle for supporting evidence based policy, yet remained a low priority spending wise with no observed strategic links to relevant strategic, longer-term needs. The lack of an observed, clearly articulated and coherent strategy to support evidenced based policy was one of AQEP's weakest areas. This is best illustrated by looking at the spending figures. The AQEP budget over Years 1-6 shows a pattern of higher spending on priorities with much smaller sums on research for evidence. By Year 6, two years after the 2014 Theory of Change was finalised and AQEP had a more detailed M&E plan, only AUD\$39,000 was spent on "Identifying Research, good practice and case studies to build an evidence base for decision making". Despite AQEP's June 2014 Theory of Change/ Monitoring and Evaluation Plan's statement that Component 3 support MEHA on "a journey to evidence based policy making" little actual funding went to basic research as compared to funding a catch all, "Ministry priorities". Work on FEMIS appears to have become a substitute for this area, yet both the AQEP evaluation and the FEMIS evaluation cite the lack of an effective link between FEMIS and evidence based policy. Further analysis can be found in Annex 9.

FEMIS

FEMIS has a high degree of relevance to MEHA and whole of Fiji Government Priorities under the broad based, Ministry of Economy supported "E-governance agenda". By building on existing databases FEMIS had in-built use and alignment to MEHA systems. FEMIS is used for a variety of business processes such as basic reporting, tracking and resource allocation functions. Currently, FEMIS data is used for national assessment registration and dissemination, grant allocation, student attendance tracking, recording students with disability, determination of textbook requirements, calculation of transport subsidies, school finances including detailed expenditure against allocation

with budget tracking at school level, teacher leave, basic school infrastructure, and determination of staffing requirements.

By contrast there have been externally funded efforts to support digital improvements in the education sector. Immediately before Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016, a mobile needs assessment platform was developed for use by UNICEF. Experts associated with FEMIS warned that this system suffered from a number of flaws, including reliability of data collection. In the post-TC Winston response and recovery period, considerable MEHA energies were spent to use the UNICEF database, rather than focusing on improving the existing FEMIS system to be relevant to emergency management, mapping, and needs assessment, particularly asset management. The introduction of FEMIS avoided these problems by building on existing Ministry systems. The FEMIS 2017 Evaluation report found that: “The FEMIS support provided by AQEP continues to be highly relevant in the implementation of its broad program. The support started slowly and the development and acceptance of the system more broadly took time. Some AQEP and MEHA staff felt that relevance of FEMIS has come into place in the last 12 months of implementation. The system is now accepted as a fundamental tool in the education system.”

FEMIS is a critical tool but further capacity building to use FEMIS for improved corporate outcomes (such as evidence based policy making) remains a longer-term priority. Senior Ministry staff including the Head of Corporate Services expressed the view that FEMIS has won widespread acceptance within MEHA management ranks, including at Permanent Secretary and Minister levels. The challenge of “creative uptake” and “the human factor” in use of FEMIS for improved system outcomes, remains.

FEMIS data is not yet used effectively to support senior level decision making or monitor the implementation and effectiveness of policy. The data is used for high level reporting to Parliament and for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, FEMIS has the potential to be used for a broader variety of educational uses and presents an as yet untapped source of research data in the form of individual student and teacher records.

The AQEP evaluation further noted that regarding emergency management and disaster planning:

FEMIS is an excellent potential guidance tool and database for risk mapping but no significant work has been done to improve disaster preparedness and planning.

EFFECTIVENESS

AQEP was generally effective across all program components. The strongest areas of effectiveness were in literacy and numeracy and the introduction of related teaching and learning materials. Infrastructure upgrades were highly effective in helping to improve school conditions and attendance rates. FEMIS was also highly effective and a useful new tool with broad potential. The social protection components were implemented with great effectiveness but their overall role in increasing access and building school planning capacity were limited, or difficult to establish strong linkages. Support to Ministry priorities helped maintain effective relationships with MEHA counterparts.

The investments to build an evidence based policy culture suffered from a lack of strategic coherence and links to an effective program M&E system. The introduction of a Theory of Change in 2014 (several years after AQEP’s inception) was meant to establish coherent pathways to outcomes, but there is little observable evidence of a strategic vision being supported. In practice, training in the use of FEMIS tended to take the place of evidence based policy making. FEMIS, however, is only one

tool in that process. Overall effectiveness of the program would have been enhanced by a more robust M&E system effectively supported by AQEP leadership. Complete analysis of all three components with supporting quantitative data are available in Annexes 7-9.

Key Program Successes

- **Literacy and Numeracy program was effective in increasing teacher skills and ability to deliver these programs**
- **The Literacy and Numeracy delivery model was effectively designed and provided “hands-on” mentoring**
- **Despite the absence of culturally appropriate reading materials, the resources in the learning kits supported and enhanced the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.**
- **The activities of the DIS focused strongly on developing Inclusive Education Demonstration Schools, from which lessons could be learned and successful strategies scaled up**
- **Infrastructure improvements were highly effective in assisting AQEP’s end of program outcomes relating to increased educational access and improved quality of education.**

Literacy and Numeracy

Overall the program was effective in increasing teachers’ understanding of the key concepts, skills and relevant pedagogy required for the delivery of effective classroom literacy and numeracy programs. Discussions with teachers in visited schools demonstrated their grasp of the core elements of sound literacy and numeracy programs and a range of strategies that support learning in these areas. Within several schools and classrooms visited there was visual evidence of the programs in practice. These included word walls, phonemic awareness activities and whole-to-fraction examples. While this does not necessarily equate to regular practice, it does provide some evidence of use. Many teachers indicated that prior to the program they were not well equipped with the specific skills and understanding to teach an effective literacy and numeracy program. These same teachers credited AQEP with effectively building their skills in this area.

The model of delivery itself was both effective and efficient. The use of mentors and coaches provided teachers with valuable ongoing support post the training program. This is imperative in achieving a change in teacher practice. Mentoring and coaching should be considered a significant factor to the overall success of the program. This conclusion is supported by anecdotal evidence from teachers in visited schools, who indicated that the hands-on support was both beneficial and highly valued and a direct way to support and improve their practice. The model of regular visits helped to embed practice in teacher routines. There was concern regarding consistency of approach in school-based follow-up monitoring and use of guides, which is further detailed in Annex 7.

An opportunity to build capacity and address inconsistency in practice may have been missed. Head Teachers, who should be monitoring teachers in classrooms, could have been more involved with the coaches/mentors. This would have improved their understanding of the practices that teachers should be implementing daily and how to monitor and support effective teaching. Engaging with coaches/mentors on their scheduled visits could have been a valuable capacity building exercise and contributed to their overall understanding of literacy and numeracy in general as well as the pedagogies. It is recognised that this is more difficult to achieve in smaller schools where Head Teachers are also classroom teachers.

Key Program Lessons

- **Head Teachers could have been more closely included in Literacy and Numeracy training to support follow-up and monitoring**
- **The analysis and use of the Literacy and Numeracy Assessments (LANA) by schools was an area of weaknesses across the majority of schools visited**
- **The use of LANA data by teachers and Head Teachers to improve their classroom practice was not observed to be widespread, and is an area in need of future support.**
- **Some teaching and learning related resource materials were of questionable effectiveness with no clear audience.**
- **The program has been instrumental in changing not only community attitudes to people with a disability but also the attitudes of teachers and the wider community.**
- **Improved learning outcomes data for disability inclusion was scarce and not a focus of the AQEP program. This should have been part of a more strategic focus on support to evidence based policy making research.**
- **The quality of Head Teacher leadership made investments in school planning capacity more effective. Schools with weaker leadership did not have an effective transfer of AQEP grants skills to FEG grants and school planning capacity.**
- **There was no effective strategy to embed the infrastructure and school maintenance processes developed by AQEP into the Asset Management Unit (AMU)-MEHA systems, making maintenance less effective**
- **Support to Ministry priorities helped enable effective working relationships with MEHA officials and generate program buy-in, but was less effective due to lack of strategic direction, prioritisation, and a robust M&E system.**

The model of training delivery was considered to be efficient as coaches and mentors developed regular visitation schedules with coaches travelling to schools and spending time at their designated schools. This was a cost-effective approach, but also provided the opportunity for teachers to develop a sound working relationship and sense of trust with coaches and mentors.

Use of literacy and numeracy data to support gender differences could have been more effective. Girls in AQEP schools improved in literacy and numeracy achievements, but data suggests boys in AQEP schools are still performing below the mean in literacy, but at the mean in numeracy. This raises a question as to what responsive strategies AQEP could have been developed to support this cohort of students.

The question of which intervention technique in literacy and numeracy made the most difference is unclear. There was provision of both new training for teachers and new learning resources and the combination of the two was generally effective, although more analysis would be needed to determine which intervention had the most impact, and could be attributable to improvements in literacy and numeracy achievement levels. AQEP commissioned a study, however, based on the World Bank's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)/ Early Grade Maths Assessment (EGMA) in year 3 which explored this question in detail. The findings, discussed in more detail in Annex 7, included recommendations for further study on this question, and on differences between girls and boys in literacy and numeracy achievement.

The analysis and use of LANA by schools was an area of weaknesses across the majority of schools visited. Head Teachers and classroom teachers were questioned regarding LANA data. The evaluation found that although teachers are able to access the data from FEMIS they are not using the data to

develop appropriate remedial strategies to address areas of weakness. It was generally found that the most regularly used figures were the high-level data related to what band¹⁵ the school was in for literacy and numeracy. The use of LANA data by teachers and Head Teachers to improve their classroom practice was not observed to be widespread, and is an area requiring further support.

Snapshot of Activity Effectiveness: Literacy and Numeracy

Activity	Initial Effectiveness (3-6 months)	Medium-term (beyond one year)
Literacy and Numeracy Guides	Highly effective and provided the support post-training program that they needed at classroom level to deliver literacy and numeracy programs.	Unclear picture of overall rates of regular usage of practices from guides due to mixed level of monitoring – could result in decline of effective practices and return to more didactic models of pedagogy.
Literacy and numeracy training program	Highly effective in providing basic and essential knowledge, skills and understanding of current pedagogical practices in literacy and numeracy.	Effectiveness clearly reflected in take up and roll out of training program across all schools and demonstrates robustness of program in its transferability in conjunction with appropriate support.
Learning resources to support Literacy and numeracy	Highly effective in providing essential materials to support learning in these key areas.	Effectiveness relates to ongoing and regular usage levels. Literacy materials purchased may only meet needs of certain stage readers, as students who progress to higher levels will require graded readers for that level that may be beyond levels provided in kits. Materials in numeracy kit are effective up to point of transition to semi-concrete materials, but can be used for a range of ongoing activities.

Despite the absence of culturally appropriate reading materials, the resources in the learning kits were effective in supporting and enhancing the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy. The provision of basic maths equipment appeared to contribute to a change in pedagogical practice in many of the classrooms visited. The absence of items such as rulers, weights, clock faces makes the teaching of basic concepts in these areas challenging. With access to a range of concrete materials teachers were able to undertake explicit teaching episodes and clearly model concepts as opposed to using less effective and traditional didactic methods. Again, the guide was instrumental in providing clear examples and instructions on how to use the materials in the kit.

Disability Inclusion

The program has been instrumental in changing not only community attitudes to people with a disability but also the attitudes of teachers and the wider community. The activities saw increases in enrolment of students with disabilities (SWD) into mainstream schools according to AQEP data¹⁶ - from 6 to 84. Despite issues with collection and management of research data on SWD in the early phases, the development and uptake of the Disability Disaggregation Package within the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) is a significant step forward. The development of a clear

¹⁵ This refers to the MEHA examination system reporting LANA results only in terms of school average and national average rather than the individual student achievements. LANA consists of a set of outcomes and ideally, teachers should be using the LANA data to identify those outcomes not achieved by individual students and work on strategies to address them.

¹⁶ Access to Quality Education Program. 2016. *Eleventh Six-Monthly Report - July to December 2016*.

baseline will subsequently provide a clearer picture of retention and completion rates.

DIS activities have focused strongly on developing Inclusive Education Demonstration Schools, from which lessons can be learned and successful strategies scaled up. The approach used has been successful in identifying a sound model. However, many of the findings and learnings clearly indicate that this model requires intensive support (human and financial resources) and careful consideration of feasibility in terms of any potential large scale up by MEHA. The provision of grants has provided some support to schools, although careful planning and budgeting is required to reasonably accommodate SWD.

DIS demonstrated that with appropriate support (e.g. Teacher Aides, workshops on inclusivity) that students with disabilities can successfully be integrated into mainstream classrooms. A key and imminent risk is the lack of a cohort of trained Teachers Aides that are absolutely essential to support schools and teachers to provide quality learning for SWD in mainstream schools. Without this essential resource, the gains made via AQEP in this area will be lost in the short term. Without the support, many SWD may disengage from the learning process and withdraw from mainstream schools.

Some teachers interviewed were concerned about their capacity to provide appropriate and relevant differentiation in teaching and learning programs for SWD in their classrooms. This is an issue that has the potential to impact on the sustainability of the initiative. Given the considerable workload that the placement of SWD in mainstream classes creates for classroom teachers, this is an area that would have benefitted from more significant/ targeted focus and support throughout the program. A related area of identified weakness is with the arguably infrequent quarterly monitoring and mentoring visits. This is not considered sufficient to address issues or provide support that would assist teachers in developing skills and knowledge.

Improved learning outcomes data for SWD was captured at classroom level, and through LANA where possible. AQEP provided capacity building support to Inclusive Education Demonstration School teachers and the MoE to track and capture learning outcomes of SWD through the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In one classroom visited during the evaluation, where there were two SWD, one of the students was taking part in the LANA. For some students with a disability, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, participation in standardised testing may be of limited value. Developing strategies, such as IEPs, that enable the monitoring of everyday learning, and learning achievements for students with a range of disabilities is complex as it requires individualised approach, but essential. Future investment in disability inclusive education should be supported by a strategy to progress efforts in this area.

Social Protection

Social protection activities were well executed but it was unclear if they or other interventions were more effective in boosting attendance. Stakeholders interviewed as part of a qualitative case study¹⁷ in nine AQEP supported schools consisting of Head Teachers, Literacy Coordinators, Numeracy Coordinators, other teachers, school managers, member of the school management committees, students, parents and community leaders identified the following AQEP activities as most influential on increased student attendance and decreased absentee rates:

- Parental Awareness Activities: 34%
- School Infrastructure Improvements: 22%
- Support for School Management Committees (SMC): 19%
- AQEP School Grants: 19%.

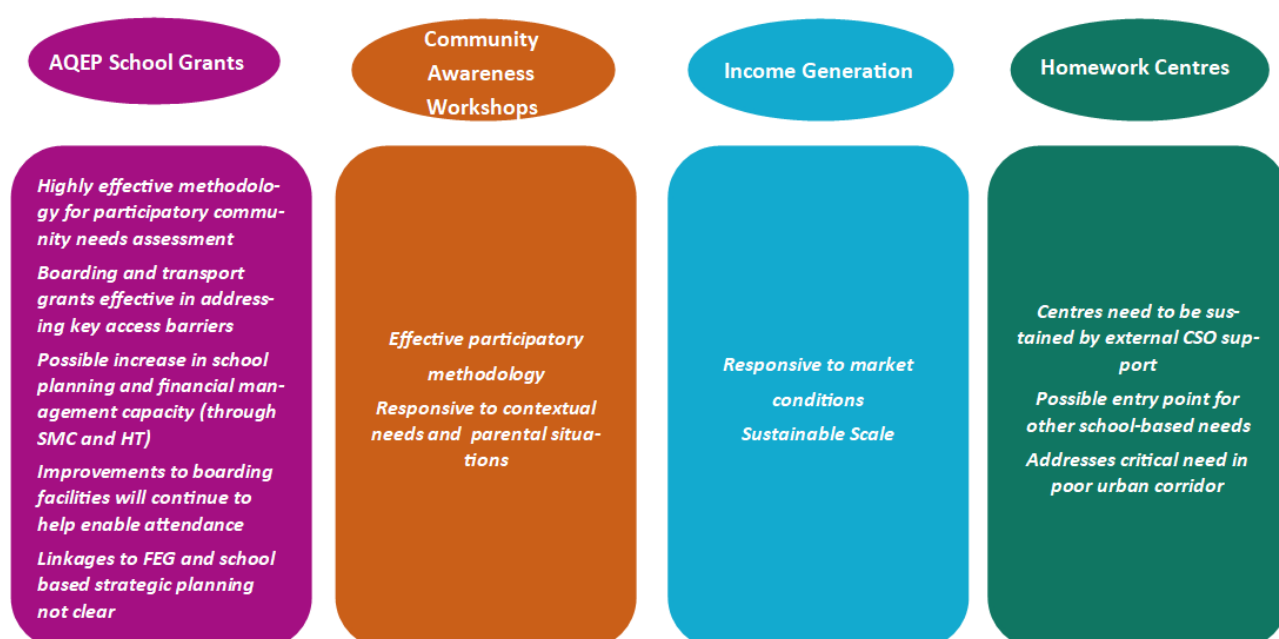
¹⁷ Access to Quality Education Program. 2017. *AQEP School Case Studies Comparative Analysis Final Report. Part A.* 18 April 2017.

The vast majority of Head Teachers and School Managers (over 75%) said, often without prompting, that improvements to school infrastructure was the single biggest factor changing parental outlook and causing a drop in absenteeism. This was a view largely shared by members of the school management committee, Mother's Club members, and selected teachers. Other key areas mentioned were improvements in teaching styles to a child-centred approach through the coaching and mentoring component of the Literacy and Numeracy initiative. Community awareness raising was also mentioned, but mostly linked to changed parental perceptions due to improvements in infrastructure and teaching styles.

The open questions of the evaluators, "Which activities helped increase attendance most?" were asked at all schools. Answers almost uniformly suggest that infrastructure was the most important reason for an increase in children's attendance, with improvements in literacy and numeracy methods a second reason. To help validate this finding, the same question was asked to two separate senior education officials at regional/district offices in both Ra and Labasa, and to a cohort of both AQEP trained and non-AQEP trained Literacy and Numeracy teachers who were participating in a focus group discussion with the evaluation team in Labasa. The answer in every case was the same, with infrastructure improvements scoring at the top. The finding therefore suggests that infrastructure improvements had a significant if not determinative effect on enabling access and boosting school attendance.

School grants (AQEP grants) were effectively implemented and helped support AQEP projects, but their longer-term effectiveness on building school planning capacity was questionable. As noted under relevance, AQEP officers indicated that improvements to how schools used FEG grants, and how they planned annually, were also objectives of the AQEP grants process. Training in the AQEP grants proposal and implementation process was time and resource intensive. There was, however, less evidence that this training and investment was effectively translated into building school planning capacity. At each of the 15 schools visited, evaluators requested both annual plans and the five-year strategic plans. In every school but one, these documents were mostly rudimentary and template based. Planning capacity was observed to be strongest in schools where head teachers were skilled leaders.

Snapshot of Social Protection Effectiveness



Infrastructure

Infrastructure improvements were highly effective in assisting AQEP's end of program outcomes relating to increased educational access and improved quality of education. This was evident in informant responses at all levels, from schools and communities to district offices and senior MEHA officials. Further analysis regarding specific details relating to the infrastructure process can be found in Annex 8. Below are more general findings relating to AQEP's infrastructure effectiveness as a whole.

The infrastructure procurement process efficiently delivered the agreed scope of work in a timely manner and within the budgets allocated. They followed best practice procurement procedures and delivered value-for-money infrastructure outcomes according to evaluation observations. The infrastructure investments were not only effectively delivered to meet scope of works specifications, the overall effect on boosting access and quality was one of AQEP's strongest components.

Disabled persons' infrastructure was completed, with less effective works carried out in AQEP Years 1-4, then greatly improved after 2014. Toilets had been poorly constructed (e.g. grip rails had been removed) and ramping between buildings had not been contiguous in these earlier works. This was identified in the 2015 Infrastructure Formative Evaluation Report and DFAT's Accessibility Design Guide Part B, Annex A has been incorporated into the contracts for the year 5/6 works. As these schools were still under construction, the Evaluation Team were unable to assess how successfully the guidelines had been followed.

There was no effective strategy to embed the infrastructure and school maintenance processes developed by AQEP into the AMU-MEHA systems. This was part of a general pattern observed regarding maintenance. While scopes of work were carried out effectively, there were few linkages to school planning processes, use of FEG grants at the school level, and linkages to MEHA through to the AMU. This was a strategic oversight which should have been picked up by both AQEP leadership and a more effective Monitoring and Evaluation regime.

Support to Evidence Based Policy/Ministry Priorities

Support to Ministry priorities helped enable effective working relationships with MEHA officials and generate program buy-in. It is noted that priorities were set by MEHA, Program Coordination Committee (PCC) and DFAT. The Program was also expected to be responsive to disasters and capacity gaps in the MEHA.

Component Three was flexibly designed to support MEHA emerging priorities with a view to "supporting the journey to an evidence based policy making process" according to AQEP's Theory of Change Model. The AQEP evaluators note that considerable money was spent on these "Ministry priorities", with considerably less on activities identified with policy evidence based policy making. It is noted that Component 3 also covered FEMIS, program M&E and sustainability.

The research products or papers produced were limited and, as noted above, weighted towards "AQEP branding" (e.g. "best practice" which appear to reflect standard practice packaged under "AQEP"). This conclusion is based on a budget analysis of spending under Component Three, a read through of the research products, and through interviews with the Head of Corporate Services who provided the context. The overall goal of enabling evidence based policy under Component Three appears to have been overtaken by the creation and support of FEMIS. However, it is acknowledged that FEMIS was an important strategic priority for the MEHA, and would build a strong foundation to assist the Ministry to access quality data that would contribute to evidence based planning, policy development and decision making.

There was an effective use of funds for items such as printers, hardware, and textbook production. AQEP's responsiveness was welcome and filled a needed funding gap, but did not necessarily add longer-term value around evidence based policy making.

FEMIS

FEMIS has been extremely effective. It has helped the entire system collect and manage data. AQEP's assistance has included technical programming, database advice and implementation, and provision of hardware. AQEP has also helped to effectively unite databases and systems into the single FEMIS source. From the FEMIS May 2017 Evaluation report:

"The approach of the system development was to produce an EMIS as one single data source over a period of four years. This demonstrated a substantial change from the initial system, where three databases made up the data storage: SIMS (School Information System); FESA (Education Staffing Information System); and LANA (Literacy and Numeracy Assessment System)."

AQEP was effective in helping to create a tool for compliance and accountability, and less effective in helping MEHA link FEMIS to teaching and learning outcomes. The FEMIS 2017 evaluation found that:

"There is huge potential to move from accountability and compliance to better informed decision-making and improvement of teaching and learning. Most of the persons interviewed acknowledged that the functions of FEMIS have not been utilised sufficiently in improving learning. There is a lack of skills among staff to carry out higher level analysis to inform teaching and learning. This, however, is understandable given the time needed to develop such a system and incorporate a strong structure of data quality and maintenance."

The AQEP end of program evaluation supports that conclusion and found that at the school level, there was superficial use, if any, of available LANA data via FEMIS to change teaching and learning strategies. Future FEMIS support should focus on creative ways to support larger policy aims to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

EFFICIENCY

Despite challenges associated with contextual change in both the Fijian and Australian government policy and budget, the Program delivered the interventions within budget and anticipated timelines overall. However, as noted on page 15 under 'Limitations of the Evaluation', the sense that AQEP had been implemented efficiently overall has been gathered from internal DFAT quality reporting.

- In the early stages of implementation (2012), the pace of implementation met expectations of efficiency of the Technical Assessment Group (TAG) review and the Mid-Term Review Team. Apart from the TAG and Mid-Term reviews, there have not been any external assessments around program efficiency. While an Independent Evaluation had been planned for 2016, this did not occur due to the damage sustained by the education sector following Tropical Cyclone Winston.

Value for Money

From 2011-2017 over AUD45 million was spent (this evaluation's scope does not include an additional AUD16.3 million spent on TC Winston infrastructure upgrade and repair). This is an average of AUD7.5 million per year, although due to changes in allocations and design the yearly allocations differed considerably. This compares to roughly AUD287.04 million (from 2016 Fiji Budget Analysis by Price Waterhouse Coopers¹⁸ spent by the Fiji Government on primary and secondary education. AQEP's own figures claim a total assistance to 222 schools which is roughly 25% of all primary schools in Fiji.

¹⁸ PricewaterhouseCoopers. 2015. *Fiji Budget 2016. The Future: A Strong Fiji, a Fair Fiji, a Healthy Fiji. Budget Commentary.* 6 November 2015 downloaded at http://fijivillage.com/eventpages/2015/Budget2016/Documents/PWC_Fiji_Budget_Brief.pdf

Since 2011 over 45,927 students have benefitted from the AQEP program, which represents roughly 22% of total school enrolment. Given these numbers and the relatively small percentage (4.1%) of the average annual national budget for education, **AQEP’s achievements represent a large value add for the Australian taxpayer given the outsized impact of some important initiatives.** Among the “game changing” initiatives:

- The introduction and roll-out of FEMIS as the one-source data management system for MEHA and a significant potential platform for evidence based policy making
- The introduction and roll-out of AQEP designed child-centred Literacy and Numeracy teaching strategies has been adopted wholesale with positive initial impacts on learning outcomes and a “revolutionary” approach to engaging students at the classroom level
- The Disability Inclusion package of policies based on the 5 disability inclusion schools
- Widespread infrastructure repair to basic school services, WASH, and upgrading selected schools to Category 5 cyclone standards.
- DFAT is also in a strong position to leverage further future support to the education system by building on the above AQEP game changing initiatives and consolidating these gains through support at a systems level.

SUSTAINABILITY

Key Program Successes

- **The Literacy and Numeracy program package was adopted by MEHA, and now has a budget allocation, and supported by dedicated staff**
- **The disability inclusion program has helped provide a model for further practice and raised awareness in schools**
- **The infrastructure program helped reveal system needs for longer-term maintenance**
- **FEMIS has been adopted and supported by Ministry-supported officials**

Literacy and Numeracy

The Literacy and Numeracy program package was adopted by MEHA and supported by dedicated staff. To sustain the gains achieved in AQEP, it will require MEHA to implement long term, regular and strategic professional development plans, and commit to embedding new literacy and numeracy teacher’s daily repertoire across the country. The training program has provided the MEHA with a model of “effective practice” in literacy and numeracy instruction. Further work on student assessment and evaluation is recommended.

Teaching and Learning Resources

Head Teachers with strong leadership skills are key to sustainability. The AQEP School Case Studies¹⁹ noted that a common factor in the AQEP schools that have shown improvements in attendance and learning is the influential leadership of the Head Teacher. In these cases, the Head Teachers have been able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their school and effectively use the available resources to improve school outcomes through communication with stakeholders and by motivating

¹⁹ Access to Quality Education Program. 2017. *AQEP School Case Studies: Comparative Analysis. Final Report.* 18 April 2017.

teachers, school management committees and the community to support school activities. Strong school leadership resulted in stronger observed teacher implementation of literacy and numeracy strategies in classrooms. Training for Head Teachers in Curriculum Leadership, Teaching and Learning, including mentoring and monitoring is recommended to sustain and build on AQEP achievements and will be an important feature in the next education program.

Teacher motivation and engagement is tied to effective teacher practice and well-developed curriculum and resources. Teaching and learning resources provided to the 85 AQEP schools has generated short-term benefits to 53% of other primary schools in Fiji with low LANA results that had received early grade readers from the Program. There is potential for schools to source teaching and learning materials using their Free Education Grants.

Disability Inclusion

Institutionalisation of Inclusive Demonstration Schools is a key sector stakeholder priority. The attitude and capacity of mainstream classroom teachers is key to the success of disability inclusion in mainstream schools. All of the teachers interviewed during the evaluation indicated that they were not well equipped to support students with disabilities in their classrooms before AQEP and wanted further training/ support. Many indicated that they now had a better understanding of disability inclusion and were supportive of SWD entering mainstream schools. The process of mainstreaming DIS appears to be gaining traction, but will be reliant on appropriate levels of resourcing (human and financial) to be sustainable.

Inclusive Education approach must be more widely adopted and effectively supported.

Given that the MEHA has only one dedicated officer for Inclusive Education, it is unlikely that, without expansion of staff and a dedicated support unit, the inclusive education model will not be sustainable. Many classroom teachers struggle with appropriately differentiating and supporting the range of learning levels of able bodied students in their classes, which becomes more pronounced when addressing the variable needs of SWD.

Without appropriate support in teaching and teacher aide resources, the long-term sustainability of disability inclusion is at risk. The success of this initiative is heavily reliant on the provision of trained teacher aides. Practically, a finite number of teacher aides would only reach a small number of SWD in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, the classroom teacher will need to have the appropriate training and resources to effectively support these students.

Key Program Lessons

- The Social Protection initiatives were highly dependent on AQEP and unlikely to be sustainable in most schools without strong Head Teacher leadership
- Longer-term sustainability will require MEHA commitment to embedding new literacy and numeracy practice in teacher's daily repertoire
- Head Teachers with strong leadership skills are key to sustainability
- Without appropriate support in teaching and teacher aide resources, the long-term sustainability of disability inclusion is at risk.

Social Protection

The Social Protection initiatives were highly dependent on AQEP and unlikely to be sustainable in most schools without strong Head Teacher leadership. While many schools had effectively and

successfully been navigated through the AQEP grants process, they had not been trained in use of FEG grants. FEMIS contains a FEG grant window with line item allocations for how FEG grants should be spent. AQEP's grants mentoring was not focused on the MEHA mandated breakdown, but on AQEP conditions and criteria. In two of twenty AQEP schools there were school annual plans which demonstrated a level of sophistication necessary for targeted funding to address school level disadvantage and access issues. These plans had received outside assistance but not from AQEP. School annual plans were, in general, rudimentary and did not appear to include AQEP methods. In those schools where school leadership was strongest, there was more evidence that AQEP's work would be translated into MEHA (FEG and annual plan) modes.

MEHA continues to view access and parental views on education as a priority challenge, and there was no Ministry aligned social protection "model" to adopt. Parental engagement in education is pillar number 4, an additional ministerial policy launched in February 2016²⁰ with Ministry officials recommending that future support address this issue at a more systemic level.

Infrastructure

AQEP included an exit strategy and a number of initiatives to embed AQEP infrastructure systems in the MEHA. These include:

- A maintenance workshop at the completion of the infrastructure works at each school with the objective of training School Management Committees (SMCs) on how to care for and maintain newly upgraded Infrastructure at their schools.
- Training SMCs to understand the school maintenance planning process and techniques and using the Maintenance Manual.
- Formalising the School Maintenance Plan and following up with the "Free Education Grant" allocation from the Ministry of Education (20% for Infrastructure).
- Enhancing the MEHA legal framework and policy on school infrastructure by providing technical assistance for MEHA to review the School Establishment and OHS policies including a review of the MEHA minimum standards for infrastructure. This will provide a benchmark for the Ministry in monitoring the quality of school infrastructure in schools.
- Gathering and importing infrastructure data into the FEMIS to enable AMU to monitor school infrastructure asset accounting and condition.

Based on interviews with MEHA AMU officers, the Infrastructure evaluator found that AQEP's strategy to embed infrastructure and school maintenance processes into AMU's systems would not be successful.

The asset accounting and condition reporting for infrastructure in the FEMIS is unreliable. Due to a lack of resources and capability within the AMU the infrastructure reporting functions have been delegated to the schools, who, while capable of asset accounting do not have the skill set to report on asset condition.

There is no effective strategy to embed the infrastructure and school maintenance processes developed by AQEP into the AMU-MEHA systems. Initially AQEP was based out of Quality House with the AMU, but as AQEP grew there was inadequate space and most of the AQEP team moved to Flagstaff. While AQEP still worked closely with the AMU, the frequent changeover of key AMU Staff

²⁰ The other three pillars in the MEHA reform agenda since 2015 are 1: improvement in teacher delivery; 2: improvement in school infrastructure; and 3: improvement in content/curriculum.

(there have been 6 AMU Directors since 2012) and the additional work required by the AMU due to floods and cyclones disrupted this relationship.

While the maintenance training workshops were well received, the turnovers in MEHA teaching staff, Head Teachers and SMCs meant that the knowledge gained from these workshops was often lost. Some schools have requested that maintenance mentoring and training be ongoing and engineering assistance be provided on how to best utilise the FEG maintenance grants.

The School Maintenance Manual, while very useful on “how to do maintenance” does not adequately address the management of school assets, planning, prioritising and resourcing annual maintenance budgets and capital works and lacks a policy linkage into the MEHA legal framework. These shortcomings have been recognised by AQEP and the manual has been revised as an additional activity under output 6.4.

Support to Evidence Based Policy/Ministry Priorities

There is little evidence of sustainable practice regarding evidence based policy making. The best avenue moving forward would be to continue to work with FEMIS, which had itself become a proxy or substitute for evidence based policy, but an imperfect one without the right support as discussed under the FEMIS findings and evaluation.

FEMIS

FEMIS is a sustainable system but must be effectively linked to “the human factor” with research, studies, and analysis effectively incorporated into its systems. FEMIS has been enthusiastically endorsed and adopted by MEHA. The remaining issues relate to long-term costs and support.

The Ministry now has established FEMIS and Information Technology (IT) support staff positions. These positions are under the Corporate Services section and include an IT Unit manager, an officer dedicated to training and support, a data cleaner that communicates with schools to ensure accurate data entry, and a senior programmer. AQEP supported an additional programmer and a data quality analyst. The FEMIS evaluation noted the following regarding sustainability which is endorsed by this evaluation:

“The budget for FEMIS should be explicitly stated in the government budget to ensure long term sustainability of the system. Currently, a significant amount of the costs has come from the donor budget, and the detailed expenditure by the Ministry on line items are not accounted for. All donor funds should be routed through the government system. The budget should be clearly defined with a line for each of the proposed following categories: (a) Data collection; (b) Auditing mechanisms; (c) Staffing; (d) Training and professional development; (e) Dissemination of materials (such as printing and publishing); (f) Infrastructure (software, hardware), and (g) regular maintenance of the system.”

VIII. AQEP CROSS CUTTING FINDINGS

Management effectiveness

AQEP succeeded largely due to the effectiveness of its individual teams and component units. The individual teams and units were managed effectively by all accounts. At each level of implementation, there was significant evidence of AQEP’s responsiveness to emerging requests, its ability to undertake the logistics of arranging frequent travel to remote locations, and its flexibility with regard to DFAT changes and requests.

Key observations around management effectiveness include the following:

- The lack of an effective M&E framework before 2014 was not unreasonable considering the Program went through a major re-design in 2012 which necessitated a total re-write of the M&E framework.
- There were gaps in linkages between the programs at the component level: linking FEMIS to the evidence based policy making stream; linking SBM model social protection access engagement work with MEHA policies and strategies; linking FEG grants to social protection grant making to ensure uptake and sustainability
- Over-reliance on “Ministry priorities” responsiveness at the expense of robust support to evidence based policy making and research support which may be a reality that development programs have to deal with
- Missed opportunities in emergency response and advocating for better capacity in emergency preparedness within MEHA based on the experiences of TC Winston and other natural disasters which is an issue not confined to MEHA and AQEP
- Support for gender was ineffective and there was no sign of leadership on gender in the areas of literacy and numeracy teaching strategy differentiation

It is the nature of evaluations to operate in hindsight and commenting on a program is infinitely easier than implementing one. AQEP succeeded in much of its efforts, with fully engaged teams and widespread admiration and appreciation for AQEP’s work across most of the stakeholders interviewed.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation was one of the weakest areas of AQEP overall. Part of this was due to initial changes in the overall design of the program and the early switch at DFAT’s request to an SBM model. The initial framework, the end of program outcomes, provided a high-level guide that was then supplemented by a lower level set of detailed indicators at the activity level. The result was a system whose high-level goals were understood but where linkages within and between work streams were not as evident. This resulted in a redesign and in 2014 a more comprehensive Theory of Change was developed, nearly 3 years after AQEP’s commencement. The following was noted under the program logic of the revised 2014 M&E framework:

“Although the Goal and intended outcomes of AQEP are clear and understood, a coherent program logic outlining the causal mechanisms between the various activities/work streams and components with goals and outcomes was not developed as part of the original program design. Component 1 was redesigned during Year 1 and a program logic establishing some immediate and intermediate outcomes was developed for the redesigned component. Component 3 developed over Years 1 to 3 as a responsive component to MEHAE priorities. It became apparent during the development of this Plan that a program logic/theory of change is needed which articulates the thinking as to how the various key initiatives within AQEP link with each other and are expected to contribute to the overall Program goal and Outcomes. A Theory of Change (ToC) articulating two End of Program Outcomes and one Long Term Outcome has now been developed by the AQEP team and will be a key reference point for the evaluation regime including the school level evaluation case studies which are to be designed in detail in Year 4. “

The introduction of the Theory of Change (ToC) was welcome and comprehensively articulated the investment logic. The ToC approach, however, does not appear to be as effectively followed as it could have been, with linkages between the components not entirely evident, and a number examples of emerging lessons, contextual changes, and priorities not effectively reported or translated into “pivoting” or changes in overall approach. Some of these examples have been listed in the above section on management effectiveness. Areas which a more mainstreamed or effective M&E process could have responded to were:

- Little evidence that emergency responses from 2012 to TC Winston resulted in newly programmed work streams to address emergency management and disaster preparedness, which, like infrastructure repair, influences learning environment quality and access issues
- Missed opportunities in linking FEMIS as a data management and gathering tool to the other component 3 work stream designed to boost MEHA capacity in evidence based-policy making
- Missed reported linkage between school leadership quality and AQEP interventions in quality and access; the AQEP evaluation noted a strong correlation between successes in quality and access interventions and the quality of school leadership, though this area does not seem to have been effectively addressed beyond the case study or best practice approach
- Linkages between school leadership and infrastructure maintenance could have been reported on and built upon as above
- Missed opportunities to shift from the AQEP grants making process under component one to a more explicitly supportive role in boosting SBM capacity in FEG spending, annual planning, and strategic planning
- Missed opportunities or lack of robust reporting on gender differences, teaching strategies, and learning outcomes
- Overall perception that M&E was self-contained and not fully-integrated into management programmatic decisions using a “utilisation focus” model of evolution and program delivery

Stakeholder engagement and cooperation

AQEP was observed to be very strong in the areas of stakeholder engagement and cooperation. Stakeholders across the sector were generally positive regarding AQEP’s engagement and responsiveness. The SBM model also allowed for and facilitated sustained engagement at the community and school levels. In general, this area is one of AQEP’s notable successes. The following brief observations can be made:

- AQEP was observed to be highly responsive and available to even the most remote of stakeholders, organising visits with impressive speed and efficiency
- AQEP social protection model was managed in a highly effective way and the model of inclusive participation had aspects of community based organisation or Non-Government Organisation (NGO) type attention to community combined with the organisational muscle, scale, and capacity of a large managing contractor
- AQEP was also highly responsive and engaged with key MEHA counterparts who appreciated their high-level attention and engagement
- AQEP was observed to be less engaged with the wider education sector community when AQEP’s interests weren’t directly involved. This was true of teaching colleges such as Fiji

National University and Corpus Christie though key members of these institutions were invited to more ceremonial affairs

- Engagement across the disability sector was generally positive with some umbrella groups indicating that AQEP did not adequately consult with them, and that AQEP's awareness raising efforts regarding disability in the public sphere were tokenistic and could have benefitted from deeper sector consultation
- Other education service providers in the sector (such as UNICEF and Save the Children) were effectively consulted and there was little or no evidence of duplication of effort or lack of coordination

Capacity Building

Across the program there has been a range of successful, relevant and effective capacity building efforts. This has been achieved at the varying levels that intersect with the program, from the ministry to district offices, schools, communities and a range of stakeholder organisations. However, there has also been a number of missed opportunities and identified gaps. One was identified in the delivery of the AQEP financial management and school plans training given to Head Teachers and school committees. Additional support and training could have been provided to Head Teachers in the areas of strategic planning and making links between the AQEP school sustainability plan and the MEHA strategic plan.

The program provided support to the ministry via a range of modes. In those cases, where there was the provision of TA, anecdotal evidence from interviews with senior ministry officers identified high levels of satisfaction in relation to the support provided. In the specific case where the focus was on capacity building of ministry staff (e.g. FEMIS staff) there were high levels of satisfaction with capacity building of staff. This was primarily the view of senior officers and not substantiated by concrete examples of enhanced capacity. The ability of the FEMIS team to manage the system with less support from TA post-AQEP will provide such evidence. High levels of praise were given for each of the TA who either worked in line or contributed in other modes of support. There were shortfalls however in the effectiveness of capacity building in the area of building support for an evidence based policy, which are covered under Component 3's findings.

District Offices suffered from capacity constraints. A key issue raised by AQEP in relation to the District Offices was the current perceived role of the district staff ("as supervisors- someone who tells them (Head teachers) what to do". AQEP identified in the Year 3 Work Plan that Component 1 focuses on a proactive problem solving approach with the schools as opposed to the current reactive approach that is used by the districts. Senior education officers often appear to be in "crisis management mode" due to their smaller numbers and understanding of their respective roles. The AQEP Year 3 work plan provided an opportunity to introduce them to the role they can play as mentors and partners to develop access to a quality education. A number of strategies are suggested in the document to address this issue.

School capacity was enhanced in literacy and numeracy but longer-term capacity regarding planning is more questionable. Evidence from Head teachers and teachers themselves indicated increased levels of confidence, understanding and the increased capacity to deliver more effective programs as a result of the interventions. Teachers who had attended the literacy and numeracy workshops were, to varying degrees of success, implementing a number of the strategies introduced by AQEP. Many Head Teachers expressed the view of the need for leadership training/ support programs that would

contribute to building their capacity. There was less evidence of longer-term capacity building effectiveness under strengthening school leadership, management, and strategic planning, particularly in the area of support to strategic allocation and investments of FEG money. This is discussed in more detail under effectiveness and relevance findings.

There was a smaller but real growth in community capacity as a result of AQEP. From discussions with community member, many indicated that it was the first time that they had engaged in any form of financial/ management training and all felt that it contributed positively towards enabling them to effectively carry out their school committee roles. Many commented on the value of the community awareness programs and in many cases commented how the disability inclusive awareness had forced them to consider people with disabilities from a different perspective.

Analysis and Learning

Results in this area are mixed across AQEP. There have been numerous reports produced from each of the component areas where analysis of data has been undertaken, though in a number of cases the findings have not always resulted in actions to address identified issues.

The data in relation to Literacy and Numeracy achievement has demonstrated improvement for boys and girls across the cohort of schools. However, while the data from the comparative study of early years reading and maths shows an improvement in AQEP schools, the degree of significance is lesser when closely analysed. In terms of analysis there was an opportunity to investigate this further. The data and findings from the baseline and throughout the program in relation to the gender disparity in achievement of boys in comparison to girls is another area in which further analysis and investigation could have contributed to learning and subsequent responses within the program.

Use of reading guides were mixed and this was not identified until later than it should have. There was an issue of irregular usage (as low as 41% in case of use of numeracy guides) and the lost opportunity to apply any learning from this. The lesson was that irregular usage was more widespread across schools, which effects on achievement levels of students more broadly. There appear to be a number of areas in which learning was not directly applied or whereby issues may have been identified but not responded to quickly or in some cases at all.

Emergency response

MEHA's emergency preparedness and disaster reduction framework could be strengthened, particularly at the school level. AQEP's involvement in emergency response and its overall effectiveness was evaluated in a separate but related Tropical Cyclone Winston Evaluation in March 2017. There are a number of findings and recommendations in that document which will be called upon to inform the next design of DFAT assistance to MEHA.

While emergency response effectiveness was not in scope for this evaluation, several key contextual notes should be documented:

- School-level emergency preparedness planning is rudimentary and suffers from a lack of an accepted school-level planning framework (templates) and guidance system
- There is little if any risk mapping nor a sound understanding of high-risk schools, probability of risks and hazards, identification of safer places at school level, or effective policies around use of schools as community evacuation centres

- School head teachers and managers, as well as parents and community members expressed a strong desire for future assistance in that area
- MEHA senior officials including the Permanent Secretary also strongly support future assistance to education in emergencies.
- The introduction of FEMIS is an excellent tool and can easily be purpose fit to include plans, guidance, risk mapping, and other emergency related at low cost, mirroring work done in Australian and other school systems in this area.
- Given the repeated nature of natural disasters, AQEP did not appear to effectively engage with this area on a planning basis other than in the area of infrastructure upgrades. This remains a key gap and must be addressed effectively in a future program of assistance.

Disability

This is an area in which important and significant progress and achievement has been made. The twin track approach taken has resulted in a genuine paradigm or perception shift. This has been done by supporting the mainstreaming of students with a disability through the provision of training for teacher aides and addressing barriers to access via infrastructure and awareness raising. These “shifts” relate to how people with disability are viewed and how they can actively participate in contexts of school and community. Of particular significance is the introduction of the disability disaggregation package on FEMIS. This will enable the collection of disability and sex-disaggregated data of students, which will make a valuable contribution to the policy and planning for MEHA.

From a broader community perspective, awareness regarding disabilities was raised. The engagement with a number of organisations that support and advocate for people with a disability contributed in a very positive way to raising awareness in schools and the community. It also assisted in raising the profile of these organisations and the important work they do. It is important to note the observed impact that the awareness raising via the roadshow had on many of the teachers, head teachers, parents and member of the community. A large majority of respondents were very clearly influenced by the speakers and indicated the shift in their thinking and views in relation to people with a disability.

Gender

As a key principle of AQEP, the program’s gender policies and approaches are guided by the AQEP Gender Equity Strategy (2012-2015.) **A focus on the reduction of gender disparity has achieved varying levels of success across the program.**

From the perspective of access, positive gains have been achieved with efforts in enabling and promoting equity for boys and girls with a disability. A range of strategies have been employed including community awareness programs where Coordinators worked with school staff to go out into communities to identify SWD, with a focus on locating girls. Related awareness raising activities that highlighted barriers to inclusion have also seen some success. Future use of data collection via the Disability Disaggregation package will provide a clearer picture of sex and disability across the sector.

There has been noted improvement in addressing chronic absenteeism rates for boys and girls with a drop from 29.9% (2013) to 18% (2016) for boys and 24.3% to 17% for the same time period for girls, again due in part to community awareness programs and AQEP schools focusing on sex disaggregated attendance data.

There still exists a degree of disparity in relation to achievement levels of girls and boys across the sector. The Year 4 data show girls at AQEP schools outperforming boys in both literacy and numeracy with girls representing 19% and 21% of the bottom quartile in 2015 Literacy and Numeracy compared to boys who represented 29% and 28%. In terms of performance against the national mean, girls sat at 57% (literacy) and 58% (numeracy) while boys were still below the national mean in Literacy (42%) and at the mean (50%) in numeracy. While there has been improvement there needs to be a focus on intervention and support strategies for boys. This is true particularly in literacy, and raises the question of whether the program could have responded earlier to address this issue.

AQEP's requirement that a Mother's Club member be a mandatory member of the School Management Committees was a welcome development. With the lack of equitable representation of women on School Committees, this strategy has been successful in bringing women into the decision-making process in a number of schools. Aside from the benefit of having women representatives on these key committees there was also a number of additional benefits achieved within schools. Mother's Clubs helped to develop simple classroom resources (counting bundles, sight word cards) and assisted with literacy and numeracy activities. Exposure to the learning process highlighted the importance of literacy and numeracy skills and simple things they could do to support their children.

In terms of infrastructure, lack of employment opportunities for women, along with a lack of influence over the design of buildings in their communities are key gender issues in the infrastructure sector. However, it is possible to overcome these barriers. Women have taken up technical and professional roles in the construction industry in Fiji and can act as role models to attract other women into it. **A senior female engineer took on the role of Infrastructure Specialist but she resigned for personal reasons.** AQEP management advised the Evaluation Team that they used informal channels to encourage applications from females; however, they rarely received applications from women with the adequate level of skills/academic qualifications, other than a senior female engineer that interviewed well but would not be able to manage the amount of travel required in the role.

IX KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

AQEP was generally a relevant, effective, efficient and, in many areas, sustainable program of activities. The overall recommendations relate to how AQEP successes can be built upon, and what lessons were learned.

Recommendations Relating to School Level Teaching, Learning, and Management

At the school level Head Teacher leadership proved to be a key lesson. The quality of **school leadership** helped maximise AQEP inputs, while poorer leadership was observed to minimise them short and long term. The key successes here were in **Literacy and Numeracy**, and the introduction of **Disability Inclusion Schools**. Social protection initiatives were well executed and resource intensive. They may have helped foster the perception that there were "AQEP schools" apart from the main system. This may have been due to the intensive AQEP grants making process. The social protection component shed light on how effective Head Teacher leadership can make a big difference in both school quality and access to education. In general, it is not recommended that the social protection model be carried forward and further supported. Instead, key strengths in the program can be built-

upon, such as improvements in school management capacity, especially their use of FEG grants, LANA data through FEMIS, and peer support with stronger performing schools.

Recommendation 1: That DFAT support the Literacy and Numeracy program. There is an ongoing need to build upon this training program to meet evolving capacity needs of teachers in key learning areas. This includes intervention/remedial strategies, assessment and analysis of LANA. Coordination with other Literacy and Numeracy initiatives e.g. PILNA will be important. Literacy and Numeracy support should also be embedded in any future curriculum review.

Recommendation 2: That a process of co-development be considered for literacy and numeracy support and culturally appropriate reading materials. This would be for future development of literacy and numeracy programs that includes representatives from teacher training institutes, Curriculum Development Unit and District Officers. There is a need to embed these new strategies at all levels, building system capacity wherever possible. Coordination with other Literacy and Numeracy initiatives e.g. PILNA will be important. Literacy and Numeracy support should also be embedded in any future curriculum review.

Recommendation 3: DFAT should continue to support the disability inclusion strategy. This can be done through additional professional development support for classroom teachers on teaching and learning strategies for students with disabilities. DFAT can support MEHA to investigate the sourcing and training of additional Teacher Aides and the possibility of accessing expertise from established special schools. Future support should also consider a strong focus on models of delivery of DIS within early childhood education. More effective disability inclusion happens when it is begun at an early age. Disability inclusion should also be embedded in any future review of pedagogical qualifications, as there are SWD in mainstream schools.

Recommendation 4: School leadership and management qualities make a big difference on quality and access interventions and need to be supported more explicitly. Future external support to MEHA should focus on supporting system wide strategies to boost school leadership and link that leadership to school based (practical), and not theoretical approaches. This can be done in a variety of ways, including support to existing school professional networks (clusters). It is strongly recommended that leadership support be practical and hands on, taking place at schools and not exclusively at off-site training venues. Areas of leadership focus may be strategic use of FEG grants, better planning models, financial management of school income generating projects, and infrastructure maintenance.

Recommendations Relating to Systems (Infrastructure, IT, evidence based policy, learning outcomes)

Recommendation 5. AQEP's infrastructure initiatives including the MEHA minimum infrastructure standards need to be reviewed and integrated into the MEHA legal and policy framework. A Short Term International Advisor could be employed in the next phase of the program to review AQEP infrastructure initiatives and advise MEHA on how these initiatives can be accommodated into the MEHA's legal and policy framework.

Recommendation 6: A baseline audit to assist the Asset and Monitoring Unit (AMU) should be supported. The AMU head has noted the current evidence gap regarding infrastructure planning. There is no current reliable baseline of school conditions to serve as a basis for future planning. Ad hoc school requests for MEHA capital works investments have no reliable way to be judged on their merit or priority. The current FEMIS school-level infrastructure condition entry forms do not yield good

data across the system - the questions are either too general or too confusing for a school lay person. This results in data of questionable quality. A baseline study supported by changes to this FEMIS entry page would allow for more evidence based infrastructure planning.

Recommendation 7: MEHA should help support use of FEMIS transition from a utility-focused approach to a learning focused one with DFAT's assistance. The development and implementation of FEMIS has been successful with buy-in from all the education stakeholders at the local and central levels. The system has proven very useful in managing business processes. Corporate Services should be supported to develop ways to help staff value use of FEMIS data in ways that help support evidence based learning outcomes. This would involve a general strategy to move towards a more evidence based Ministry. FEMIS is a key part of that and a potential game changer. The issue now is not the tool (FEMIS) itself, but its use beyond mere compliance. Some entry points could include helping Corporate Services use FEMIS to effectively report on their international obligations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, or their international Climate Change Adaptation treaty requirements under the Paris Accord. Better whole of Fiji government reporting can also serve as a practical motivating starting point in helping staff develop skills in better use of FEMIS for wider objectives.

Recommendation 8: Future training for principals and teachers should focus more on using data to improve teaching and learning, management and planning which DFAT could support. Currently, the focus of the FEMIS staff is to design training programs to teach FEMIS administrators and principals on how to use the system and input data for compliance purposes. This was important during the initial stages of FEMIS implementation. It will be important to deliver training that empowers school heads and teachers on how to use FEMIS to manage school operations, and monitor school, teacher and student performance. This will help to generate interest in FEMIS data by a greater number of school teachers and officials beyond administrators.

Recommendation 9: FEMIS data from Early Childhood Education Centres, Technical Colleges and Higher Education Institutions need to be targeted in the near future with support from DFAT. Good preliminary work has been done in both areas. ECE and Technical education data can be included into FEMIS and student identifiers can be used to link student longitudinal performance. The technical colleges have begun to incorporate data on employment using various methods of tracking the students once they have completed their studies. A module could be developed to track and report on employment.