

Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP)

Six-Monthly Program Report

15 August 2011 - 15 February 2012



GRM



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and in collaboration with the Fiji Ministry of Education

ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

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ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

SIX MONTHLY REPORT, 15 AUGUST 2011-15 FEBURARY 2012

1.0 Introduction

The Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP) commenced implementation on 15th August 2011. The Program design allows an inception period of six months for procurement, planning and preparation prior to roll out of activity implementation. This paper reports on the progress of the Program against the Year 1 Work Plan, particularly in relation to the procurement, planning and preparatory phase of the Program. The reporting period covers 15 August 2011 to 15 February 2012.

2.0 Progress of Program

2.1 Staff Procurement, Getting Established, Office Space

The procurement of 10 core and 3 short term staff was completed within three months of commencement date. The Team Leader/Senior Education Adviser and Senior Program Manager began work on 15th August 2011. By the first week of September, the Infrastructure and Social Protection Specialists had been mobilized. The remaining core team, consisting of an Infrastructure Coordinator, two School-Community Coordinators, a Finance/Office Manager and two Administration Assistants/Drivers commenced work in early December.

Three short term specialists – M&E, Database and Disabilities – had completed two separate inputs by mid-December 2011. Three short term Engineer Facilitators to support the school verification and monitoring activities under Component 2 commenced work on 1st February 2012.

The process to recruit two additional locally engaged staff – M&E/Database and Disabilities Inclusion Coordinators – is expected to be finalised by late February 2012.

The AQEP organizational chart is attached as Annex 1.

The Program worked with the ODA Unit/Ministry of Finance and our main partner, the Ministry of Education, to get established. Under the terms of the Subsidiary Arrangement between the Government of Fiji and the Government of Australia, the cost of supplies, goods and services, funded from the contribution of the GoA, was exempt from all taxes and duty, including but not limited to VAT. The MoE also facilitated all necessary approvals required, including visas.

The team was housed at the Suva Business Centre for 3.5 months before they moved to newly refurbished offices at the Ministry of Education Headquarters in Suva on 3rd December 2011.

2.2 Planning and Preparation

2.2.1 Across all Components

2.2.1.1 Program Launch

The program was successfully launched by the Acting Australian High Commissioner, Ms Judith Robinson, on 21st October 2011 at the Suva Business Centre. Approximately 50 people from the Australian High Commission, Government Ministries, Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and NGOs attended the launch. The only disappointment was poor media coverage on the launch.

2.2.1.2 Key Activities

Key activities in the first six months that cut across all three components of the Program included:

- A focus on data collection and analysis for evidence-based planning and decision making;
- Development of the draft Monitoring and Evaluation Framework;
- Development of the draft Disabilities Inclusion Strategy;
- Development of criteria for the selection of schools and student beneficiaries;
- Identification of rural and urban disadvantaged schools for consideration in the program based on the selection criteria;
- Preparation of the Annual Work Plan – Year 1 and other papers for the first meeting of the PCC;
- The first PCC meeting was held on 25th January 2012;

2.2.1.3 AQEP Scale-up Concept Note

At the request of AusAID, the Team prepared a concept note outlining proposed options for a Program scale-up, which was submitted on 31st January 2012. This was in response to the announcement in December 2011 by the Australian Foreign Minister, outlining the doubling of Australian aid to Fiji from A\$18m to A\$36m from 2013 - 2014.

2.2.1.4 AQEP Emergency Response

The team developed the Program emergency response and obtained approval from AusAID to utilise up to A\$500,000 of Program funds annually for humanitarian assistance during times of disasters.

In response to the floods that affected the Western Division in late January 2012, AQEP has committed to providing infrastructural support to 14 schools and will provide school kits and school levies for up to 1,500 students in up to 10 primary schools. AQEP worked closely with the Ministry of Education, and other development partners, to coordinate the verification visits of six teams to 26 schools in the Western Division and in preparing the damage assessment report.

2.2.2 Progress Report by Component

2.2.2.1 Component 1: Access

The two outputs for Component 1 in the Year One Work Plan are:

- (1) Development of Component 1 Work Plan; and
- (2) Implementation of social protection programs.

The key activities that were completed under Output 1 included:

- Consultations with MoE, Bureau of Statistics and NGOs working in poverty
- A case study research in four schools to better understand barriers to accessing school education
- Review of social protection programs internationally and in Fiji funded under Component 3;
- Recruitment of two School Community Coordinators
- Review of poverty and social protection in Fiji and development of a paper leading to the options recommended for the program;
- Preparation of policy guidelines for social protection Programs; and
- Development of Component 1 Work Plan – year one.

2.2.2.1.1 Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative study on the barriers to accessing school education was conducted in four school communities during the last quarter of 2011 by the Social Protection Specialist and three officers from the Ministry of Education (MoE). The objectives of the study were to:

- (a) provide detailed information about specific barriers that families face to access primary education for their children;
- (b) identify family situational factors that increase a student's risk of not participating in school; and
- (c) identify the kinds of interventions most likely to reduce or overcome those barriers and thereby provide guidance for the AQEP on its planning decisions.

The sample schools were purposively selected to cover four types of settlement: inner-urban, suburban, peri-urban, and rural. The team held structured, semi-structured and/or unstructured interviews with school teachers, parents, community leaders (usually head of the village) and a religious leader. The report on this study is available at the AQEP office.

2.2.2.1.2 Component 1 Work Plan – Year 1 on Hold

Three papers prepared by the Social Protection Specialist were presented to the PCC at its first meeting of 25th January. They were:

- (a) Review of Social Protection Programs in Fiji and Proposed Options;
- (b) Guidelines for Education Assistance and School Meals; and
- (c) Targeting Schools and Disadvantaged Children for AQEP Assistance.

The PCC deferred approval of the Component 1 Work Plan for Year 1 and the papers associated with this component, including the selection criteria for disadvantaged children, and asked that some revisions be made. The implications of the delay in commencing implementation of the social protection programs (output 2), as this is contingent on first getting final approval on the Year 1 Work Plan, are discussed in the issues and risk management sections.

2.2.2.2 Component 2: Infrastructure

The outputs for Component 2 in the Year One Work Plan are:

1. Development of Component 2 Work Plan; and
2. Implementation of the school improvement project.

Completed activities for Output 1 included:

- Close consultation with the Asset Monitoring Unit of the MoE;
- Recruitment of Infrastructure Coordinator;
- Development of minimum infrastructure standards; and
- Development of Work Plan for Component 2

2.2.2.2.1 School Verification

As part of the preparatory activities for Component 2 implementation roll-out, three Engineer Facilitators were recruited on 1st February 2012 and were trained in their roles. They also undertook on-the-job training during the flood assessment visits that took place from 2-4th February.

The Engineer Facilitators and the Infrastructure Coordinator have commenced verification checks on 116 schools on the Disadvantaged School List approved by the PCC, including 16 special schools, using a school verification checklist template that was developed in December 2011.

2.2.2.2.2 Infrastructure Manual

The Infrastructure Manual was completed in January 2012. It will be used to train the District Education Officers, Head Teachers and School Management Committees during March 2012. The training material is in the preparation process and is expected to be completed by the end of February 2012.

The implementation of the school improvement project (Output 2) in up to 40 schools will be rolled out at the end of March 2012.

2.2.2.2.3 Emergency Response

AQEP will provide emergency and early recovery infrastructure assistance to 14 flood affected schools in the Western division. The Program is in the process of acquiring quotations from prequalified MoE contractors. The additional workload associated with

monitoring the work of the contractors, combined with the work associated with the current Year 1 Work Plan, may put some strain on current staffing levels.

2.2.2.3 Component 3: Research and Quality Improvement

Component 3 contains eight outputs:

1. Development of Component 3 Work Plan;
2. Research Studies;
3. Disability Inclusion Strategy;
4. Scoping of capacity development needs at district level;
5. Coordination and consultation meeting with stakeholders;
6. Provision of teaching and learning materials for schools;
7. Support for MoE priority activities; and
8. Communication strategy.

Output 1 has been achieved; Outputs 2, 3, 5 (See Section 8 below), 7 and 8 have been partially completed; and Output 4 and 6 have yet to commence. This is on track.

2.2.2.3.1 Preliminary School visits

An activity that cut across all three Program components to feed into the Work Plan was the preliminary school visits to up to 40 schools made by the Team in September 2011 to Koro, Vanua Levu, Vanua Levu and Beqa. The main purpose of the school visits was to gain an understanding of the broader context and issues around schools and their communities to better inform AQEP's planning process. The Team joined the Asset Monitoring Unit on these visits as part of the monitoring process of the School Infrastructure Improvement Grants provided by the Government. Schools visits included early childhood centres, primary schools and special schools in various contexts – urban, peri urban, rural, remote-island and remote hinterland.

2.2.2.3.2 Reviews of Social Protection in Fiji and Internationally

As part of Output 2, two review studies were commissioned by AQEP in the last quarter of 2011. The first was a review of the international data on social protection and the second was a review of social protection programs in Fiji. The findings of these two studies were utilised in the development of social protection options under Component 1. They are available at the AQEP office.

2.2.2.3.3 Disability Inclusion Strategy

As part of Output 3, the Disabilities Specialist made two short inputs to Suva in early November and the second week of December 2011 for the purpose of developing the draft Disability Inclusion Strategy. On 14th December 2011, a meeting was held with 30 disabilities stakeholders from both special and mainstream schools to workshop the draft AQEP Disability Inclusion Strategy at the Tanoa Plaza Hotel in Suva. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- (a) Introduce key stakeholders to the Draft AQEP Disability Inclusion Strategy: purpose, context, rationale, approach.
- (b) Identify and discuss aspects of the Draft Disability Inclusion Strategy that require adaptation.
- (c) Identify geographic areas and stakeholders with potential for piloting aspects of the Disability Inclusion Strategy.
- (d) Discuss and agree on meaningful indicators of success in relation to disability inclusion within AQEP.

The draft AQEP Disability Inclusion Strategy is currently under review by AusAID and the MoE and is expected to be finalised by late March 2012.

2.2.2.3.4 Consultations with MoE

As preparation for Output 7, the Program Team met senior MoE staff on a number of occasions to determine potential MoE priority areas that AQEP could support in Year 1. One such meeting was a planning workshop held in late November in Deuba where 55 participants consisting of Heads of various sections, division and district education staff gathered to workshop the MoE 2012-2013 Strategic Plan, 2012 Annual Business Plan and 2012 Annual Corporate Plan. The Team Leader/Senior Education Adviser represented AQEP at the meeting and conducted a workshop to identify the needs of the MoE in relation to the four Component 3 anticipated outcomes.

Three separate training programs for School Head Teachers and School Managers and teachers will commence in March 2012. These workshops will be organized and managed by the MoE.

3.0 Achievements

As Program activity implementation has only recently commenced through the school verification visits by the AQEP Engineer Facilitators on 1st February 2012, there is not much to report on the achievements of the Program against the M&E Framework. The second half yearly report should contain a better picture of the progress of the Program in relation to the M&E Framework.

4.0 Summary of Key Issues

4.1 Data Unavailability

The lack of available data to support the planning process was evident from the beginning of the Program. Much of 2011 was taken up consulting with various stakeholders and gathering

relevant data from the Ministry and elsewhere. It was not until late last 2011 that the Program was able to access reports such as the Poverty Mapping Report and the Household Income and Expenditure Survey Report which were then used to assist the Program identify disadvantaged communities in Fiji. The collection and analysis of data will be an ongoing occurrence once activity implementation for the three components begins.

It is also important to acknowledge that the design for AQEP does not contain a Logical Framework Matrix from which the M&E Framework can draw upon as a key point of reference. Nor is there a series of baseline studies or baseline data (at the pre-operational level) from which indicators can be set so that the Program progress can be measured. The absence of a logframe remains a key gap for the identification of indicators matched to activities divided into levels of desired achievement and the precise M&E methodology. It is suggested that a Logical Framework Matrix be developed for the Program. With the data that will be collected from the baseline studies and research studies that will be conducted in Year 1, the Program indicators can then be developed more precisely for activities.

4.2 Implication of Delay in PCC Approval of Component 1

The Work Plan for Component 1 Social Protection was not approved by the PCC meeting of 25th January. It is anticipated that there may be a delay in implementation roll-out for Component 1 activities of up to a month depending on how quickly a revised work plan is presented to AusAID and approved by the PCC.

This has a number of implications for the Program, key ones being that the training of district education staff and school management committees on the processes and mechanisms for social protection assistance will now take place in late March 2012; the research case studies on barriers to school education in a number of schools will not start until late March 2012. The disbursement of Component 1 funds to targeted schools can only occur after the training of district and school management personnel have been properly trained and the disbursement of Component 1 grants is now envisaged to take place in late April or later.

4.3 Impact of Flood Response on Current Component 2 – Year One Work Plan

The diversion of attention from our current Work Plan to the AQEP emergency response to flood affected schools and students has the potential to negatively impact on the current timeframe for the implementation of the Year 1 Work Plan for Component 2. For instance, schools supported by Component 2 from the Disadvantaged School List would decrease from 60 to 40. There is also the impact on AQEP's school selection for Year 1 shifting more to the Western Division since two Engineer Facilitators will be needed there to supervise the flood rehabilitation work in 17 schools. For human resource efficiency, it would seem that more Western Division schools might get selected in Year 1 for infrastructure support as an effect of flood relief work in the West.

5.0 Update on Risk Management Plan

The mitigating strategies for the risks associated with the issues mentioned in the preceding section are outlined below.

5.1 Absence of a Program Logical Logframe Matrix/Data Unavailability

- AQEP to discuss with AusAID first whether there is a need for a Program Logical Framework to be developed; if the response is positive, then a Logical Framework Matrix will need to be developed by the M&E Specialist in collaboration with AusAID
- The Program will undertake a comprehensive baseline survey to identify target populations and to set Program-based indicators
- A number of research studies will be carried out such as a study on out-of-school children and school dropouts and more case studies on barriers to schooling.

5.2 Delay in Commencement and Completion of Component 1 – Year 1 Work Plan

- Program will provide revisions to AusAID two weeks after receipt of comprehensive feedback on the Social Component papers and Year 1 Work Plan
- Year 1 Work Plan will be revised in light of delay with the intention to still complete the program prior to 30 June 2012.

6.0 Cross Sectoral Issues

The Program has developed good working relationships with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Provincial Development, Department of Social Welfare, Poverty Eradication Unit and the Ministry of Health through the Fiji Health Sector Support Program.

7.0 Donor Coordination and Cooperation

At AusAID's invitation, the Team Leader/Senior Education Officer participated in a donor coordination meeting organised by the Ministry of Education to coordinate support by various donors to the implementation of the 3-year Fiji Education Strategic Plan 2012-2014. The sectoral and budget harmonisation meeting was held on 28th October 2011 and was attended by AusAID, New Zealand Aid Program, the Government of India and development partners UNICEF and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

AQEP worked closely with the Asset Monitoring Unit/MoE to coordinate activities of the informal Emergency Education Cluster on the floods that hit the Western Division in late January/early February. Heads of sections or representatives from AusAID, the Japanese Embassy, UNICEF, Save the Children and AQEP attended the Education Cluster Group on 10th February to discuss the findings of the Flood Assessment Report presented by the AMU Director. Development partners spoke of indicative support from their agencies. AusAID, AQEP, UNICEF and Save the Children met on 14th February to discuss in greater detail their support to the flood relief initiative.

8.0 Management of Stakeholder Relationships

Key stakeholder relationships were established in the first four months of the Program and will continue to be strengthened.

The following courtesy visits were led by the Acting Australian High Commissioner, Ms Judith Robinson, to introduce the Team Leader and Program:

- Minister for Education
- Budget Aid and Coordinating Committee (BACC) chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance.

Courtesy visits, led by AusAID, were made to the following key Government partners Ministries:

- ODA Section, Ministry of Finance
- Ministry for Education
- Ministry of Provincial Development
- Department of Social Welfare
- Poverty Eradication Unit.

Courtesy visits were also paid to two international organisations - WHO and UNICEF.

AQEP also held regular meetings with AusAID and the Ministry of Education to discuss key issues in procurement and planning. The AQEP team also held various meetings with relevant sections of the Ministry – Primary, ECE, Special Education, Asset Monitoring Unit, Examinations and Assessment Unit, Curriculum Advisory Section and the Human Resource Management Unit (policy, planning, statistics, research, professional development) to better understand MoE processes, issues and needs.

As part of Output 5, two consultation workshops were held in December 2011 with key stakeholders to introduce the Program and to consult on important aspects of AQEP's planning process. The first was co-hosted with the Primary Section where 40 Divisional and District Education Officers converged at the Hotel Southern Cross in Suva from 6-9th December 2011. The AQEP objectives were to:

- (a) Introduce senior staff and nine education district staff to the goal, objectives, components, outputs & outcomes of the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP).
- (b) Consult on the proposed AQEP criteria for school and student selection.
- (c) Consult on the draft plan and targets for each of the three components.
- (d) Identify research and capacity development priorities of the MoE.
- (e) Identify common issues faced by district education staff in the implementation of education programs.
- (f) Identify the support that education district staff officers can provide AQEP in program implementation.

The second consultation meeting was held with 53 Government partners, NGOs, FBOs, professional associations (Head Teachers; School Managers), tertiary institutions and disabilities stakeholders on 13th December 2011 at the Tanoa Plaza Hotel in Suva. The objectives of the stakeholders' workshop were to:

- (a) Introduce participants to the goal, objectives, components and outcomes of the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP).
- (b) Consult on the proposed AQEP criteria for school and student selection.
- (c) Consult on the draft plan and targets for each of the three components.
- (d) Identify common issues faced by stakeholders in the implementation of education programs.

Following the first AQEP PCC on January 25 2012, both AusAID and AQEP/GRM have committed to increased communication and engagement to ensure alignment with key directions/focus of the Program.

9.0 Conclusion

While AQEP faced various challenges in the first six months of operation, it has also made some significant progress. The main procurement processes were completed in good time so that all the key staff were appointed within four months of start-up, the team was accommodated at the Ministry of Education, the Year 1 Work Plan was developed on schedule and the first PCC meeting took place within the stipulated five month period.

Although approval of Component 1 activities for Year 1 is currently on hold pending revisions, Components 2 and 3 have been given approval to proceed. The criteria for the selection of schools for infrastructure assistance were approved by the PCC so school verification visits commenced on time.

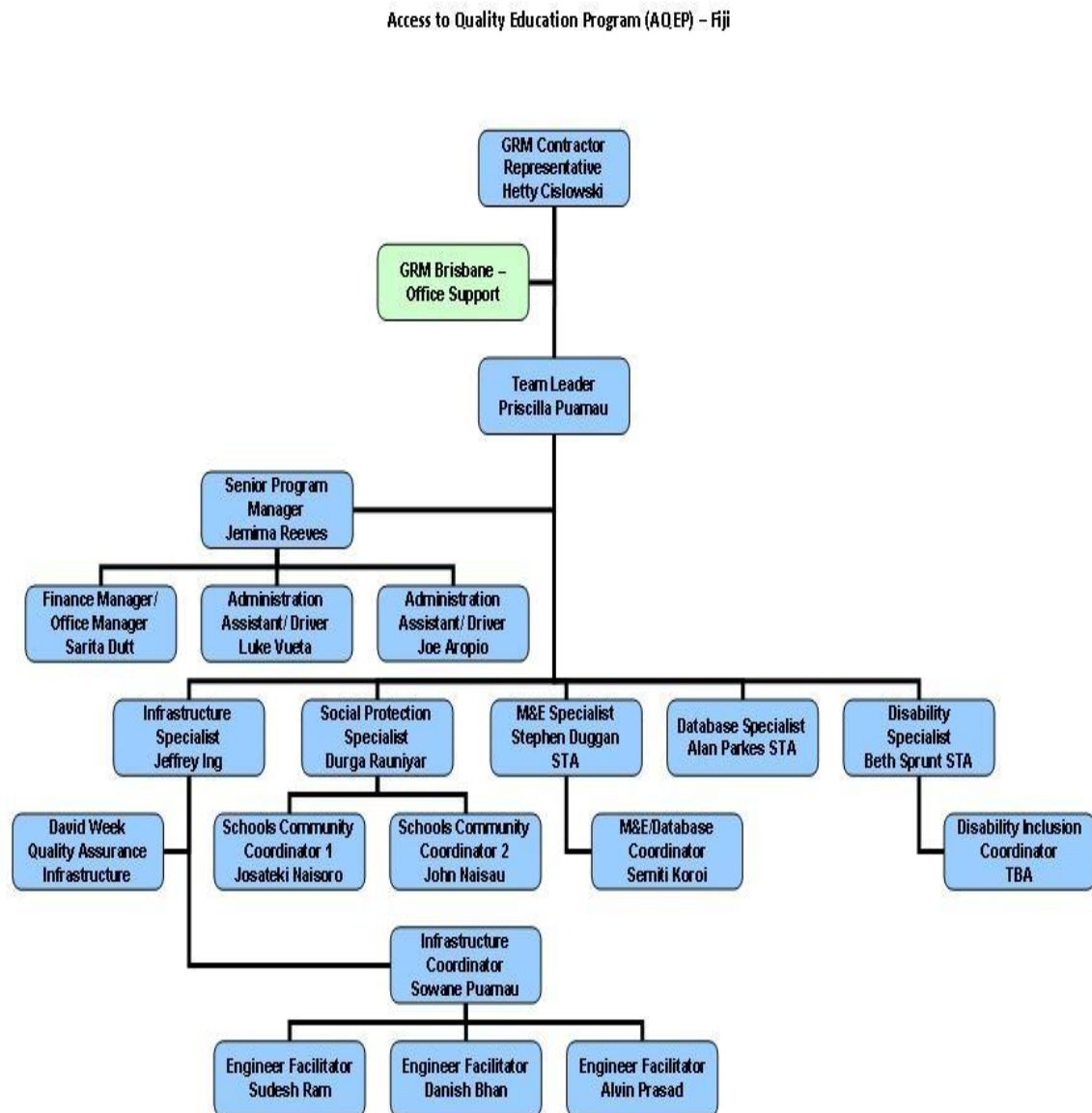
The main activities that will take place in the remaining four months of this financial year from February to June 2012 will include:

- Verification of eligible schools (February-mid March);
- Pre-qualification of service providers/contractors for Component 2 (February-March);
- Comprehensive baseline survey and research studies (March-June);

- Development of an AQEP database to maintain indicator data for monitoring purposes and data collected from baseline surveys such as enrolment, attendance, retention, drop-outs; and
- Training of education district officers, head teachers and school management committees on the AQEP Program Manual (March-April)
- Disbursement of funds for Components 1 and 2 to schools (late March to April)
- Monitoring of implementation.

The actual implementation of many of the activities for all three components will commence in March or April 2012 for a period of 3-4 months and will be reported on in the next six monthly report of the Program.

Annex 1: AQEP Organisational Chart



NOTES:

- (a) The M&E/Database and Disability Inclusion Coordinators report to STA Specialists on technical matters; however, they report to the Team Leader on a day-to-day basis from a management perspective.
- (b) The M&E/Database Coordinator reports to both the M&E and Database Specialists from a technical perspective.