

Fiji Education Program (FEP)

DFAT Management Response to Independent Mid-Term Review

The Fiji Education Program (FEP) is an AUD 25 million investment which aims to *'improve learning outcomes for all Fijian girls and boys'*. Currently in the fourth year of implementation (including a transitional year between July 2017 and June 2018), it is the latest iteration of a long-term commitment by the Australian Government to support the education sector in Fiji. The FEP was preceded by the Fiji Education Sector Support Program (FESP, 2004 to 2009) and the Access to Quality Education Program (AQEP, 2011 to 2017).

The FEP which sits under the Fiji Program Facility was designed to help the Government of Fiji put in place the systemic conditions for improving literacy and numeracy skills of school children in Fiji. The FEP proposed activities across three interconnected pillars:

- **Improving centralised policymaking and management of education by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA)**, including through the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS);
- **Improving the performance of schools and teachers**, including through engagement with Fiji's five Teacher Training Institutions (TTI's); and
- **Building stronger links with communities** and engaging them in the management of schools.

In 2020, a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, impacted the day-to-day work and the strategic direction of the program. In response to these factors and emerging Government of Fiji priorities related to public service employment reforms, the Theory of Change was revised in mid-2020, with the FEP focussed on progressing four key outcome areas across the three existing pillars referenced above, including:

1. An inclusive Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum;
2. Sufficient resources for Special and Inclusive Education (SIE);
3. MEHA systems that allocate staff and funds fairly and efficiently; and
4. Evidence-based policies in areas identified by MEHA.

Overview of the Mid-Term Review

In May 2021, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the FEP (the 'Review'), covering the period November 2018 to March 2021. It comes as the FEP nears the end of Phase 1 (December 2021), with approval having been given for a three-year program extension to December 2024. The Review was delivered from June-August 2021. The purpose of the Review was to:

- Assess the performance of the FEP to date (including its responsiveness to MEHA priorities and needs);
- Situate the assessment of performance within significant recent changes in the operating environment (including challenges associated with COVID-19); and
- Identify opportunities for the next phase of the FEP, which is due to commence in January 2022.

The Review team participated in a 'virtual' mission over the period from 8-23 July 2021, though interviews continued to be held with stakeholders up to and including 25 August 2021. A total of 55 interviews were conducted, mostly via Zoom. Key stakeholders were interviewed from all levels of MEHA (from the Permanent Secretary (PS) for Education down to several Heads of Schools), DFAT in Suva, Fiji Education Program staff, Fiji Program Support Facility staff, Teacher Training Institutions, and other institutions with an interest in the education sector.

Individual management response to the recommendations

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframes
Recommendation 1 <p>The importance of the Fiji Education Program (FEP) to the Government of Fiji (GoF), and to the Government of Australia (GoA), including its role in supporting economic and social recovery from COVID-19 in Fiji, should be at the forefront of any discussions on budget allocations/reallocations within the Australian Aid Program in Fiji.</p>	Agree	The FEP is highly relevant to both GoF and GoA priorities, as reflected in key strategic documents and plans. It is a critical reflection of the ambition captured within the Vuvala Partnership. It focuses on niche areas that are critical to improving learning outcomes for boys and girls in Fiji, including those with disabilities, and it has an important role to play in supporting economic and social recovery from COVID-19.	When the Project Coordinating Committee (PCC) meets in February 2022, this will be highlighted in the opening discussion and all strategic discussions after that, including with Ministers.	By end February 2022 and ongoing
Recommendation 2 <p>DFAT/FEP and MEHA should work closely and collaboratively in coming months to agree priority areas for the next phase of the FEP and this 'design update' should be signed off by both parties. Any future changes to priorities and/or strategic focus should be considered and agreed by the Steering Committee (see recommendation 10 below), which should include senior representatives of both MEHA and DFAT/FEP.</p>	Agree	The FEP has been flexible and responsive to GoF priorities, which has ensured it is a highly relevant program. However, the focus of the FEP on responsiveness has often come at the expense of the strategic ambition of the program outlined in the FEP design. Several new activities that were funded by a reallocation of FEP resources were not ultimately completed, while some priorities outlined in the FEP design were not progressed due to resources being reallocated elsewhere.	DFAT/FEP and MEHA collaboration will continue until the Design Update is finalised and signed off by both MEHA and DFAT and the PCC.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised
Recommendation 3 <p>The FEP should return to the Theory of Change outlined in the FEP design for the next phase (or a modified version of it), which would</p>	Agree	The design update will revisit the original Theory of Change. Funding may limit the extent outcomes can be achieved within each of the 3 levels of systems.	The Design Update is currently in progress and already exploring what could be done	End of April – Design Update to be finalised

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mean delivering activities within each of the three levels of systems required to achieve improved learning outcomes for all Fiji's girls and boys (with the available budget to determine what is possible within each level). Several of the drivers that led to a diversion away from this approach in recent years no longer appear to be relevant.		The FEP has achieved some important results and a strong case can be made for effectiveness, despite the frequent changes to priorities.	within the three levels.	
Recommendation 4 GEDSI and emergency preparedness should be clearly reflected as cross-cutting issues in the Theory of Change/Results Framework for the next phase. These cross-cutting lenses should be applied across all activities supported by the FEP.	Agree	<p>GEDSI is a key priority for DFAT; as is emergency preparedness to minimise disruption to the school year and protect school infrastructure.</p> <p>Progress on cross-cutting issues has been mixed. There are some excellent results for disability inclusion/special and inclusive education, which stem from a clear strategic approach and long-term, consistent engagement. Less progress is visible for gender equality, though recent steps to refresh the GEDSI strategy and the establishment of a new gender adviser role in the Ministry bode well for the next phase. There are opportunities to further mainstream emergency preparedness within FEP's activities.</p>	This will be factored into the Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised
Recommendation 5 DFAT/FEP and MEHA should agree on the overarching purpose of the FEP for the next phase. Is it an adaptive, responsive program	Agree	The MEL system and the Theory of Change has had little influence over programming decisions (which instead have been largely driven by emerging/changing MEHA priorities), though	To be part of Design Update process.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised

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that meets the priorities of MEHA (and changes when those priorities change), or is it a 'traditional' program with shared strategic objectives? The FEP MEL framework/approach should then be developed accordingly. Information from the MEL system should be fed into FEP governance mechanisms and regularly considered by key decision-makers (see recommendation 10 below).		there are several examples where MEL has been used to inform the delivery of individual activities.		
Recommendation 6 Once the overarching purpose of the program is clear, DFAT and FEP should agree on minimum reporting requirements for the next phase. Ideally, more time should be spent testing the effectiveness of the component parts of the program and the extent to which they are contributing to the long-term development outcome. These analytical pieces should be discussed with DFAT (and MEHA) beforehand to ensure buy-in.	Agree	The frequent changes to the priorities of the FEP has meant frequent updates to the MEL architecture, including the results framework. The time spent doing this appears to have come at the cost of more useful analysis/deep dives on program-level issues that might otherwise be used to inform programming decisions.	The original design will be revisited and factored into the Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised
Recommendation 7 Intended outcomes for the next phase of the FEP should be specific and focused on niche but transformative areas, appropriate to the size of the program budget. If additional budget becomes available there are opportunities for it to be deployed effectively (see recommendation 14).	Agree	The annual FEP budget is significantly less than it was under AQEP. It is less than 2 per cent of MEHA's operating budget. But while the program is small and focused on niche areas, the budget appears to be sufficient for the FEP to make a meaningful contribution to the long-term development outcome. Gaps in progress/results achieved do not appear to be	This will be factored into the Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised

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		because of a lack of budget, but because of the way the budget has been allocated (at the request of MEHA and with the support of DFAT).		
Recommendation 8 All cross-cutting issues should be appropriately resourced for the next phase of the FEP. For gender equality and emergency preparedness, this means increasing resources from current levels. For all it means providing resources (tools and methodologies) to build the capacity of FEP staff to mainstream these issues in their work, as well as progressing relevant activities with the Ministry.	Agree in part	Sharing across Facility of these resources rather than just for FEP would be a more efficient use of resources. There is considerable capacity within the FEP (i.e. human resources) and further technical support available from the Fiji Facility. In areas such as MEL and SIE, the level of resources available to progress these issues appears to be sufficient. However, gender equality and emergency preparedness both appear to have been under-resourced.	This will be factored into the Design Update. Resourcing will depend on funding availability.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised
Recommendation 9 There should be more intentional collaboration between FEP and other sectors/programs within the Fiji Facility to share knowledge, promote learning, and develop strategies to resolve common challenges.	Agree	There are some examples of information sharing and collaboration between different parts of the Fiji Facility, which have benefited the FEP. But there are also opportunities to strengthen this. A cross-facility GEDSI network has been established, but there do not appear to be other similar cross-facility networks where knowledge can be shared, and common challenges discussed.	This will be factored into the Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised.
Recommendation 10 Governance mechanisms, including a Steering Committee with representation from MEHA,	Agree	Governance mechanisms for the FEP have been largely non-existent since the first 12 months of the program. Without these forums, there has been little opportunity to consider the merits of changing focus/priorities, including the	The PCC is being reactivated and the first meeting will be held in February.	End of February

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DFAT and the FEP, should be re-introduced to provide strategic oversight of the program.		impact of these decisions on progress towards the FEP's long-term development outcome.		
Recommendation 11 MEHA and DFAT/FEP should explore the merits of a more collaborative, partnership-style mode of working, with principles of mutual responsibility and accountability, clearly articulated roles and responsibilities and individual contributions to the agreed program objectives. This should be reflected in a formal agreement (partnership agreement or similar), signed by both parties. This would mitigate the risks associated with staff turnover.	Agree	The engagement between MEHA and DFAT/FEP has been largely transactional in recent years, and program priorities have changed as key staff have changed.	The reactivated PCC is the beginning a more strategic partnership and will be factored into the Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised
Recommendation 12 DFAT/FEP should consider ways of communicating/ showcasing the work that is being progressed through the FEP to ensure that public diplomacy benefits are being maximised.	Agree	This is also a DFAT priority.	Will be factored into the Design Update and Workplan.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised
Recommendation 13 In terms of the 'how' of program delivery... In addition to reinstituting appropriate governance and management mechanisms (point 10), the FEP should consider:	Agree	The Design update will revisit the original Theory of Change as recommended by the MTR. Broadening modalities will be considered.	Will be factored into Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broadening the modalities of program delivery • setting aside a small amount of the program budget to be responsive to additional requests for support from the Ministry. 		An allocation will be determined annually, to enable DFAT/FEP to be responsive to additional requests from MEHA.		
<p>Recommendation 14</p> <p>In terms of ‘what’ the program could focus on (subject to budget availability):</p> <p>Central/Ministry level systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum revisions (though with an added focus on assessments) • Updates to FEMIS and support for ICT (including use of data in decision-making); potential advisory support to strengthen MEHA monitoring systems • Connectivity/enabling environment for remote learning and remote teacher professional development (including Moodle) <p>District/School level systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for TTI’s on the implementation of the Fiji Teacher Attributes Framework (pre-service) 	Agree in part	The Design update will revisit the original Theory of Change as recommended by the MTR. Focus areas will be considered and agreed as part of the design update, subject to available resources.	Will be factored into Design Update.	End of April – Design Update to be finalised

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development for in-service teachers and school leaders aligned with the FTAF (including through Moodle) Targeted support and intervention for a small number of individual schools to improve literacy and numeracy <p>Community level systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training, mentoring and/or supervision of new school counsellors funded by the Ministry Training for teachers to identify students who require support Building the involvement of parents in the delivery of education <p>Cross-cutting issues – gender equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Ministry to respond to new requirements under the Gender Transformative Institutional Initiative (including gender-based budgeting) and the Fiji Country Gender Assessment <p>Cross-cutting issues – disability inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Ministry to verify students with disabilities in inclusive schools, and build the capacity of teachers to deliver special and inclusive education <p>Cross-cutting issues – emergency preparedness</p>				

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for connectivity/the enabling environment for remote learning. And ensure an emergency preparedness lens is applied to all other activities being supported by the FEP 				