

MANGAGEMENT RESPONSE: BUK BILONG PIKININI LITERACY PROGRAM (EVALUATION 2018)

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DFAT welcomes this evaluation, which is the first independent review of Buk bilong Pikinini (BbP)'s activities in Papua New Guinea. The review notes the importance of high quality pre-primary education, and acknowledges BbP's contribution to improving access to early learning, noting that its programs target highly vulnerable populations which otherwise have few opportunities to access school preparation and early learning activities. DFAT will work with BbP and other stakeholders to consider where and how early childhood education and care should fit within our portfolio of support to PNG's educational system.

Buk bilong Pikinini

BbP is grateful to DFAT for the opportunity to have this evaluation of our Early Childhood Literacy programs and services to some of the most vulnerable children in PNG. BbP looks forward to implementing as many recommendations and suggestions as possible to ensure that we continue to improve the outcomes for the children attending our programs. We are also grateful to ACER for this valuable in-depth evaluation, which will be a great guide forward for the organisation's programs and sustainability.

The evaluation report makes a number of suggestions which touch upon the complex language structure in PNG. BbP would like to take this opportunity to clarify the reference to the use of the vernacular in our program's early learning activities. BbP has not explicitly documented language use in the curriculum and does not have a programmatic approach to the use of vernacular. BbP highly values mother tongues and our teachers naturally use vernacular to support the transition to and acquisition of English for as long as required by the children. As of 2018, there are signs that the PNG Government intends to move away from its Outcome Based Education policy, as the focus on the vernacular may have come at a cost, with many students failing university entry exams due to low levels of English. BbP's programs prepare children for school, where the ability to succeed is very much dependent on a child's level of English. BbP has therefore not had a language policy for Tok Ples acquisition and use.

Recommendations	BbP Response and Action	DFAT Response and Action
<p>1. It is recommended that the Australian Government continue to support the BbP program in two ways. The first is to provide support for the ongoing running of the BbP programs. The second is to provide support to implement the recommendations of this report. Support to implement the recommendations of this report may include financial support as well facilitating access to networks and other resources as described below. Such support is strongly aligned with the Australian Government's strategy for work with the PNG education sector, including finding ways to accelerate literacy outcomes (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018).</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>BbP will look forward to working with DFAT/Palladium on the recommended actions to be able to continue to support vulnerable children across PNG with high quality ECEC programs.</p>	<p>Partly Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will consider whether and how best to support BbP's activities, including through further funding and other support and advice as appropriate to assist BbP respond to the review's recommendations.</p>
<p>2. Broaden the focus of the BbP programs to be more holistic and foster the social and emotional and</p>	<p>Agree.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>

<p>cognitive skills that are important precursors to literacy. This will ensure that BbP is strongly aligned with the forthcoming Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy, and will continue to lead the development programs for very vulnerable children in the PNG ECEC sector.</p>	<p>BbP fully agrees to this recommendation, and will look for opportunities to broaden the program focus within the available funding. Ideally, this would include resources to allow:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Hiring an additional Teacher-Librarian at all Library Learning Centres, 2) Sourcing the required materials and 3) Developing a more holistic program, which incorporates aspects to further develop the children's social, emotional and cognitive skills. 	<p>DFAT will discuss with BbP how it might broaden early learning activities to include a greater focus on social, emotional and cognitive skills.</p>
<p>3. Expand the early childhood literacy program by introducing a 4-year-old program and ensuring children get exposed to a minimum of 450 hours per year. The afterschool program should be reduced in scope so that the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program can be provided earlier and in a greater dose.</p>	<p>Partly agree.</p> <p>BbP fully embraces the recommendation to expand the ECL program if further funding was to become available - (including the above requirements).</p> <p>However, a priority has been placed on utilising BbP's current capacity to support</p>	<p>Partly Agree.</p> <p>DFAT acknowledges the need for greater access to early learning. However, with limited financial and other resources available there needs to be further discussion about the benefits of giving a smaller number of children additional hours of support (through a 4-year-old program), versus providing more children with the existing 5-year-old program.</p>

	<p>the maximum number of children (albeit for fewer hours) to become “school ready” and able to succeed in the currently strained PNG school system.</p> <p>A 75%/25% split between the ECL and After school programs rather than a 50%/50% as is currently the case could be trialled if support for this should become available.</p>	<p>Furthermore, DFAT also believes that BbP’s after school program offers a low cost way of encouraging and assisting learning in the early years of school, particularly for families where books are rare and in communities where other library options are not available. DFAT will therefore discuss with BbP and others what mix of services should be provided in view of resource constraints.</p>
<p>4. BbP should focus on lifting the instructional quality of the program. Whilst the emotional support and classroom organisation of the program are excellent, there is an opportunity to focus on improving the instructional support. The Australian Government should support BbP to create new partnerships with relevant organisations are required, support visits to high-functioning ECEC centres, and seek agreement to provide BbP with training materials.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>BbP is hoping to receive support to further train Teacher-Librarians/ HO staff and source the required materials to further improve the instructional quality of the program. Opportunities for observation and training in Australia would be highly valued.</p>	<p>Partly Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will look at opportunities to assist BbP to access relevant learning materials and expertise to improve instructional support.</p>

<p>5. BbP should seek partnerships with measurement and assessment experts to review and redevelop its assessments. The development of high-quality assessment appropriate for children in the years before school would support the sustainability of the program through the generation of reliable and valid data of the value-add of the program and would be a contribution to PNG more broadly. The Australian Government should support BbP to access this expertise, as it does not exist within PNG.</p>	<p>Agree.</p> <p>BbP is aware of the importance of quality assessments and has recently received support through Australian Volunteer International (AVI), which has placed a volunteer in BbP to provide short-term technical support on monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>Partly Agree.</p> <p>DFAT will explore options, including through technical assistance to assist BbP strengthen its measurement and assessment of early learning.</p>
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