



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



SKILLING-UP IN TIMOR-LESTE AND PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES:

Meta-evaluation of DFAT's support for skills development

Skilling-up in Timor-Leste and Pacific island countries

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Photos in the report are courtesy of the Australian Pacific Training Coalition

CONTENTS

1. Foreword
2. Terminology
3. Executive summary
4. Management Response
5. Introduction
6. Evaluation purpose, scope and methodology
7. Summary of key findings
8. Improving DFAT assistance
9. Recommendations
10. Annex

FOREWORD

High-quality skills programs are vital in addressing development challenges faced by many Pacific island countries, and in Timor-Leste. In these countries, growing youth populations, high unemployment, lack of formal sector jobs, limited access to international labour markets and ongoing gender inequality have hampered social and economic progress.

In this context, Australia has been supporting skills development systems in Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste to produce quality graduates at all levels, who are in demand by employers both nationally and internationally, and who have the entrepreneurial skills to create their own jobs.

Going forward, there are significant changes that could influence the need for technical and vocational support in these countries. There will be increased opportunities for labour mobility through, for example, Australia's Pacific Labour Scheme. The increased investment in infrastructure by Australia and other development partners will need a corresponding investment in building local infrastructure sector skills. The ongoing relevance of Australia's engagement in this sector will clearly require ensuring the right balance in servicing changing local labour market needs and facilitating access to jobs overseas.

This meta-evaluation highlights some key lessons to improve Australia's support in the skills sector. For example, better use of labour market analysis will help ensure Australia's investments in skills training align with changing national and international labour market needs. Equally, a better understanding of local context and capacity, including for example the capacity of local employers to provide appropriate work experience, will help Australia deliver tailored skills investments.

The meta-evaluation identifies opportunities to improve the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of skills development programs. It also highlights the importance of well-trained and resourced program management teams, who can share best practice approaches and learn from each other. These findings confirm the fundamental importance of good aid management not only for successful skills development investments, but also for aid investments more generally.

Foreword

The meta-evaluation makes four recommendations to improve the relevance and effectiveness of Australia's skills development investments. The Independent Evaluation Committee endorses these recommendations. They represent practical, realistic actions, which build on existing work already underway in DFAT. The actions will equip DFAT staff with the necessary analysis, guidance and systems to improve the design and successful implementation of investments in the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W Jarvie', is positioned on a light blue rectangular background.

Dr Wendy Jarvie

Member, Independent Evaluation Committee

TERMINOLOGY

Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC)

The former Australia Pacific Technical College was a flagship program of the Australian Government, promoting economic growth across the Pacific region through skills training and employment. The College has transitioned to become the Australia Pacific Training Coalition, a centre of training excellence supporting the delivery of Australian-standard skills and qualifications for a wide range of vocational careers throughout the Pacific.

Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Systems which track and assess program implementation, outputs and outcomes, and apply knowledge gained from evidence and analysis to improve programs and ensure accountability.

Skills

Technical/professional, cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities which, in combination, are required to participate productively in the workforce.

Skills development

Broader concept of acquiring the skills required for effective workforce participation.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Education and training that results in the development of work-related knowledge and skills.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Australia shares the responsibilities and challenges of supporting economic prosperity in Pacific island countries and in Timor-Leste. Skills development is a critical component of Australia's development cooperation, and helps ensure:

- local labour markets in the region are well supported with work ready training graduates
- people from Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste are well prepared to take up labour mobility opportunities.

Between 2012–13 and 2017–18, Australia invested more than \$250 million in TVET investments in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

This meta-evaluation assessed 11 evaluations of TVET investments in the Pacific and Timor-Leste in this period to determine:

- relevance of Australian support
- results achieved through Australian support
- factors that contributed to success
- factors that constrained effectiveness
- lessons learned to improve Australian support for skills development.

This analysis provides a useful resource for DFAT TVET managers and partners.

Overall findings

Overall this work has reinforced the fundamental importance of good aid management for successful TVET investments. Quality designs, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems are critical.

It also confirmed the need for sound contextual analysis, especially labor market needs analysis, to ensure skills training profiles align with labour market demand to strengthen employment prospects for graduates.

Results

Australia's TVET programs have:

- increased the equitable supply of skills in the region
- improved quality in TVET systems
- improved outcomes for industry and graduates.

Relevance of Australian support

- All 11 evaluations confirmed the relevance of Australia's support.
- Most evaluations focused only on the degree to which the investment aligned with partner government and Australian high-level policy objectives rather than relevance to industry, graduates and other target groups.

Executive summary

Factors that contributed to success

1. Quality investment designs and transition to implementation

Success was evident where programs:

- took a long-term view to reform and improvement in the skills sector
- promoted meaningful skills stakeholder participation, including with local employers, to localise ownership, leadership and influence
- encouraged flexibility to foster ongoing learning and adaptation
- provided a plausible program logic with clear objectives
- ensured key staff and systems (e.g. monitoring and evaluation) were in place early.

2. Effective implementation

Success was evident where programs:

- recruited, developed and retaining high-quality staff with experience in the skills sector
- deepened and broadened engagement with TVET systems in partner countries, public and private sectors
- established strong and productive relationships between development programs and country partners
- developed mutually beneficial collaboration with other DFAT and donor investments.

3. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Success was evident where programs:

- developed strong evaluation terms of reference, developed with partner governments and other skills sector stakeholders
- supported adaptive management of investment performance
- had clarity of purpose and clearly defined audiences
- focused on collecting the most important information
- aligned complexity, available resources and capacity
- used evidence to inform credible evaluations.



Factors that constrained effectiveness

Some investments were constrained by:

1. weaker design analysis (for example, limited assessment of partner ownership, capacity and policy limitations, level of ambition not aligned with available resources)
2. less credible program logics (for example, objectives too ambitious given resources or timeframe, or not clearly defined or measurable).

Improving DFAT assistance

DFAT skills development investments are learning and adapting, but not consistently or systematically.

Ongoing relevance of DFAT's engagement in skills development will require ensuring:

1. TVET systems access evidence required to anticipate and respond to fast-changing labour market demands
2. the right balance between servicing local labour market needs and facilitating increased worker mobility.

DFAT should invest only in TVET programs that demonstrate labour market demand and reasonable employment prospects for graduates.

High-quality design and implementation (including monitoring and evaluation for learning), and effective program management, are critical for ongoing relevance, continuous improvement and providing evidence of achievement.

DFAT should identify and adopt strategies for consistent improvement in the quality of key aid management cycle processes and products, especially enhanced quality of designs, MEL systems and evaluation.

This should include building on work underway to improve DFAT's investment monitoring systems in response to the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) 2018 Review of Investment Monitoring Systems.

DFAT could strengthen the effectiveness of aid management of TVET investments by:

1. ensuring investment managers are appropriately prepared and supported to effectively perform their core roles and responsibilities
2. strengthening mechanisms for capacity development, learning and knowledge sharing among DFAT officers managing skills development investments
3. fostering a strong performance culture that encourages and supports effective monitoring and access to ongoing technical support.

Recommendations

1. DFAT update and promote the existing 'Skills for Prosperity in the Australian Aid Program' Investment Guidance Note.
2. DFAT build the capacity of skills investment managers, including:
 - better addressing the technical information needs of program managers to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of skills development investments
 - strengthening mechanisms for capacity development, learning and knowledge sharing among DFAT officers managing skills development investments.
3. The Office of the Pacific consider how best to support labour market analysis in Pacific island countries, Timor-Leste and Australia including to identify future labour market needs in the region and better inform TVET programming.
4. The Office of Development Effectiveness conduct an assessment of a group of investments at early implementation phase focusing on: testing program logic and objectives; assessing availability of information and performance data sources; and reviewing allocation of resources for monitoring and evaluation.



MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Overall response to the evaluation

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) welcomes the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) meta-evaluation of Australia's support for skills development in Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste. The meta-evaluation highlights some key lessons to improve Australian support for skills development.

A strategic evaluation of Australia's support for skills development is timely. The skills development sector is a dynamic one, needing to respond to current demands whilst planning and adapting for the future. In the Pacific and Timor-Leste, this dynamism comes in the context of changing labour mobility options, changing domestic market needs, and global pressures including technological advancement and climate change.

The meta-evaluation identifies opportunities for improvements across the aid management cycle including enhancing the quality of evaluations, designs, implementation and investment level monitoring systems. DFAT welcomes the meta-evaluation's recognition of staff capability as a key enabler of effective programming and aid management. It highlights the need to ensure skills program managers have the necessary guidance, training and capacity to properly implement successful investments in the sector.

The aid management issues identified are not necessarily specific to TVET investments, but also provide sound lessons that can be applied to all aid investments.

The Department accepts each recommendation of this meta-evaluation. The recommendations build on existing work being undertaken by relevant areas of DFAT to improve the capacity of officers managing skills development investments, strengthen investment monitoring systems and support labour market analysis.

Implementing the recommendations will contribute to strengthening the relevance and effectiveness of Australia's investments in skills development in the region.

Management response

Recommendation	Response
Recommendation 1 <p>DFAT update and promote the existing “Skills for Prosperity in the Australian Aid Program” Investment Guidance Note, including to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• emphasise that all new designs should include political economy analysis and provisions for detailed labour market analysis to underpin the investment rationale and inform strategic investment priorities• emphasise that all new designs should integrate gender equality and social inclusion as a core strategic development issue• articulate an approach to partnerships, including objectives and principles for collaboration• articulate an approach to enhance the coherence between bilateral and regional programs.	AGREE. <p>Promotion of guidance note already underway, including during the recent (4-7 November 2019) Education Policy Forum and will be an ongoing process.</p> <p>Update of guidance note will take place during 2020 in consultation with Office of the Pacific and other relevant areas, including gender and disability inclusive development teams, to consider how best to incorporate suggested approaches.</p>
Recommendation 2 <p>DFAT build capacity of skills investment managers, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• better addressing the technical information needs of program managers to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of skills development investments• strengthening mechanisms for capacity development, learning and knowledge sharing among DFAT officers managing skills development investments.	AGREE. <p>Updating of e-learning modules underway. Completion expected in 2020.</p> <p>DFAT will look for opportunities to use the existing education community of practice for targeted knowledge-sharing in the area of skills during 2020.</p>

Management response

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>The Office of the Pacific consider how best to support labour market analysis in Pacific island countries, Timor-Leste and Australia including to identify future labour market needs in the region and better inform TVET programming.</p>	<p>AGREE.</p> <p>The Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) and the Pacific Labour Scheme have commissioned a series of labour market assessments of Pacific island countries, Timor-Leste and Australia. These assessments will be used to inform the design and implementation of bilateral and regional education and skills investments in support of enhanced labour mobility pathways.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>The Office of Development Effectiveness conduct an assessment of a group of investments at early implementation phase, focussing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • testing program logic and objectives • assessing availability of information and performance data sources • reviewing allocation of resources for monitoring and evaluation. 	<p>AGREE.</p> <p>This recommendation builds on existing work underway to implement recommendations of the 2018 ODE Evaluation of Investment-level Monitoring Systems. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reworking standard contract templates to include a clause requiring all investments to have a quality assured Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (including MEL Framework) in place within the first 3 - 6 months and a MEL system and baseline within 12 months of mobilisation of an investment (or other suitable period) • a new monitoring and evaluation panel to provide technical advice for strengthening investment monitoring systems on request of program areas. <p>ODE will assess a selected number of investments, including skills investments, early in their implementation phase, for the quality of investment-monitoring systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and are generating credible and robust information to inform key programming decisions and wider learning.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Policy context – skills development

Developing high-quality skills is vital to addressing the wide range of development challenges faced by many countries in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

In this context, Pacific and Timor-Leste TVET systems must produce quality graduates at all levels who:

- are in demand by employers nationally and internationally
- have the entrepreneurial skills to create their own jobs.

Despite promising changes in recent years, challenges remain for Pacific and Timor-Leste TVET providers and national governments to provide affordable, accessible and quality training.

Skills development will therefore remain an important part of Australia's development assistance, including as part of Australia's stepped-up engagement in the region.

Challenges

- burgeoning youth populations and high unemployment
- limited employer capacity to provide work experience
- lack of formal sector jobs
- limited access to international labour markets
- ongoing gender inequality
- local partner capacity and skills policy framework limitations

Rationale

The rationale for long-term investment in TVET has substantial policy and research backing:

- An increased focus on skills and education will be vital if the Pacific is to realise its economic potential. (Foreign Policy White Paper, 2017)
- Improved access to high quality, post-secondary education and training is one of four priorities in *DFAT's Strategy for Australia's aid investments in education 2015–2020*.
- Expanding Pacific access to international labour markets will have a greater impact on regional development than any other measure. (Pacific Possible: Labour Mobility, World Bank–ANU, 2016)
- Pacific employers report that an inadequately trained workforce is a major constraint on their operations (<http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/enterprise-surveys>)
- The Pacific Regional Education Framework, Moving Towards Education 2030 seeks to '... develop models for TVET that emphasize its value, relevance to industry and the labour market.'
- In addition, increased investment by donors on infrastructure projects in the region will require local cohorts of qualified trades workers over the longer term.

Introduction

Policy context (continued)

Strengthened TVET systems must respond to current labour market demands while planning and adapting for future needs, including:

- changing domestic market requirements
- changing labour mobility options
- technological advancements
- climate change.



Increased mobility of workers

Unemployment, underemployment and vulnerable employment are significant issues in Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste.

In addition to the Seasonal Workers' Program established in 2012, in 2018, Australia introduced the:

- Pacific Labour Scheme to enable workers from Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste to take up low and semi-skilled work opportunities in rural and regional Australia for up to three years
- Pacific Labour Facility to facilitate increased mobility of workers.

More workers than formal jobs in Pacific island countries

Australia's support for skills and labour mobility opportunities responds directly to the disparity between annual labour force entrants and formal jobs created.

Table 1: Pacific labour force entrants and formal sector job creation

Country	Labour force entrants (annually)	Formal sector jobs created (annually)
Kiribati	3,200	65
PNG	87,000	11,932
Solomon Islands	13,000	2,089
Tonga	5,600	35
Vanuatu	3,800	1,260

Source: Pacific Possible: Labour Mobility, World Bank (draws from census data in various countries: 1999 – 2011) Australian National University, 2016

Investment context

What is the size of DFAT's investment?

Between 2012–13 and 2017–18, DFAT invested \$260 million in the TVET investments covered by this meta-evaluation, averaging almost \$43.26 million per year.

How does DFAT manage TVET investments?

1. Through bilateral programs in:
 - a. the Pacific (including in Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu)
 - b. Timor-Leste.
2. Through the Pacific regional program (APTC).

What is the nature of engagement with TVET systems?

1. Differs in each country and reflects:
 - a. unique operating contexts and reform agendas, such as program and government priorities, levels of capacity and resources
 - b. distinct challenges that lie beyond the direct control of TVET systems, including:
 - i. labour market characteristics, including workforce literacy levels
 - ii. funding models and policy frameworks
 - iii. employer capacity to provide work experience
 - iv. geography and language diversity

How have investments shifted?

Investments have moved toward a broader and deeper engagement with partner TVET systems (government agencies, TVET institutions, industry bodies and employers) to support improved TVET policy reform and implementation.

Australia's engagement in skills development in the Pacific and Timor-Leste must now effectively balance:

1. Servicing needs of local labour markets:
 - a. advancing locally led TVET system reform
 - b. strengthening TVET provision quality
 - c. ensuring net skills gain.
2. Facilitating increased graduate mobility:
 - a. ensuring quality training of in-demand qualifications
 - b. connecting increasing numbers of eligible graduates to labour mobility pathways.

EVALUATION PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose

This meta-evaluation provided evidence to inform current and future Australian support for skills development.

In doing so, it:

- assessed the relevance of DFAT's support
- identified factors that contributed to or constrained effectiveness.

Scope

The meta-evaluation assessed 11 independent program evaluations published between 2012 and 2018 targeting TVET-related outcomes in Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu and the Pacific regional program.

While not a deliberate sample, these programs broadly reflect the size and scale of DFAT's skills programs in the region.

See Table 2 for a list and details of all investments evaluated.

Methodology

The evaluation methodology was primarily a desk review of the eleven evaluations and related investment documentation. This included management responses, designs, annual Aid Quality Checks and independent research.

The evaluation included a limited number of key stakeholder interviews (involving DFAT officials in Vanuatu, Kiribati and Solomon Islands) to test and validate findings and identify evidence of the application of evaluation findings to inform subsequent investment adaptation and improvement.

Primary audience

- Country programs in the Pacific and Timor-Leste
- Pacific Labour Mobility and Skills Policy Section, DFAT Office of the Pacific
- Education Section, DFAT Development Policy Division
- Skills development and infrastructure program designers and implementers

Evaluation purpose, scope and methodology

Table 2: Investments by country/region, program details and year of evaluation

Country	Program Title	Program details	Year evaluation conducted
Kiribati	Kiribati TVET Sector Strengthening Program (TVETSSP)	Phase I Jan 2011-Jun 2012; Phase II Jul 2012-Jul 2016. \$23.6 million	2015
	Kiribati Australia Nursing Initiative	Mar 2004 - Jun 2014. \$20.7 million	2014
Pacific Regional	Australia Pacific Technical College (APTC)	Phase I mid-2007 -mid-2011, \$134 million; Phase II mid-2011 -mid-2015, \$143 million	2014
Solomon Islands	Youth@work	Dec 2013 -Dec 2015. \$1.28 million	2015
Timor-Leste	Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste (WDPTL)	2014 -2018. \$12.7 million	2018
	Training and Employment Support Program (TESP)	Jan 2013 - Dec 2014. USD7.4 million	2014
Tonga	Tonga Skills for Inclusive Economic Growth (S4IEG) Program 'Tonga skills'	Jul 2016 - Jun 2021. \$7.6 million	2018
	Tonga TVET Support Program I	May 2010 - Jun 2014. \$3.71 million	2012
Vanuatu	Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening program: Phase III	Nov 2012 - May 2016. Total for TVET phase III is \$10.5 million	2017
	Vanuatu technical and vocational education and training sector strengthening program. In 2014, name changed to Skills for Economic Growth.	2008 -2016. \$22 million	2015
	Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening program: Phase II	2009 - 2012. \$16.3 million	2012

Information sourced from evaluation reports and Aidworks.

Evaluation purpose, scope and methodology

Methodology limitations

Robust assessments of relevance, progress and achievement were constrained by a number of limitations.

1. Compared to the broader education sector there is limited data on TVET programs at a country level.
2. The meta-evaluation relied on information in investment evaluations, not primary data:
 - the reliability and quality of monitoring data that investment evaluation reports relied on (investment monitoring systems) was generally low meaning that very few were able to make credible assessments of achievement of outcomes
 - over-reliance on interviews presented sampling and bias issues (acknowledged in several reports).
3. Evaluation plans and methodologies of evaluations were not always sufficiently robust. Issues included:
 - depth of information sometimes lacking
 - gaps in information and analysis
 - challenges and successes identified often not contextualised or prioritised for severity of impact on progress toward or achievement of outcomes.
4. Additional documents proposed for review in the meta-evaluation, including investment designs and Aid Quality Checks, did not provide further insight or validation.

5. There were challenges aggregating findings from multiple evaluations assessing investments designed to:

- address different development problems
- affect different outcomes
- be delivered by different aid modalities
- be implemented in varied contexts.

6. Changes to the policy and operating environment following integration of the Australian Aid Program into DFAT (2013) made cross-program comparisons difficult.

The Mid Term Review team developed these key evaluation questions on the assumption that baselines, targets, and analysis of achievement would be available as evidence of progress. This proved to only partly be the case. (Tonga Skills 2018)

Mitigation strategies

The evaluator reviewed additional literature to identify good practice standards and guidelines, ascertain common challenges, provide further context and validate findings and lessons.

Additional literature included:

- Australian partner government plans and strategies
- international TVET and skills development articles
- other ODE evaluations.



KEY FINDINGS: RELEVANCE

Evaluation question 1: Has DFAT support for skills development been relevant?

Assessing relevance considers the extent to which:

- investment approach suits priorities and policies of target groups, recipient and donor
- investment objectives remain valid given changed circumstances
- activities and outputs support attaining objectives and impacts.

Relevance of Australia's support was affirmed in all evaluations, although most assessments focused on the extent investment objectives aligned with partner government and Australian policy priorities and frameworks. While important, policy alignment alone is only one measure of relevance.

Only some evaluations critically reflected on the extent to which investments represented the most appropriate approach to addressing the identified development problem (APTC 2014, Kiribati 2014, Vanuatu 2017).

In decentralised contexts with relatively large rural populations, a simultaneous bottom-up and top-down implementation strategy is more likely to support the development of a 'joined-up' TVET system in which the three TVET dimensions of strategy, oversight and service delivery are carefully aligned and mutually reinforcing. (Vanuatu 2017)

Across evaluations, there was little systematic evidence to support claims of relevance to partner governments beyond policy alignment, or to industry, employers or graduates.

It was a challenge, for example, for many evaluations to provide evidence to determine the extent to which skills training met training graduate needs, such as higher wages, better employment or labour mobility. (Tonga 2012, Timor-Leste 2014, APTC 2014, Kiribati 2015, Solomon Islands 2015)

This does not necessarily mean there was no benefit, but rather insufficient evidence to demonstrate relevance. This is an important limitation on the use of evaluation reports.

Public diplomacy outcomes

While not generally included in investment outcomes, Australia's skills development investments have contributed to foreign policy objectives through public diplomacy and development cooperation.

Long-term skills programs, such as APTC and the Vanuatu Skills Program, have built trust in, and understanding of, Australia. These investments have generated strong political and government support and positive engagement with a broader foreign public, especially private sector and rural and regional communities.

KEY FINDINGS: RESULTS

Despite data limitations, evaluations identified examples of significant progress toward, or achievement of, investment outcomes.

	Selected results
Increased equitable supply of skills	<p>As of August 2014, APTC had provided 6,780 graduates with relevant skills and Australian qualifications.</p> <p>APTC increased enrolment of women in training for non-traditional occupations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34% of enrolments in commercial cookery • 43% in painting and decorating • 40% in wall and floor tiling. (APTC 2014)
	<p>8,082 participants undertook training and/or follow-up support through the Vanuatu Skills Program (2009 - 2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42% female • 7% people with disability • 75% from rural areas (Vanuatu 2015)
	<p>Women own or co-own 55 (47%) of the 117 businesses engaged in TVET for Tourism coaching activities, and make up 44% of all employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4% of coaching participants are people with disability • 65% of industry expert coaches are female (Vanuatu 2017)

Key findings: Results

	Selected results
Improved quality in TVET systems	There is 'ample evidence that aspects of the Vanuatu Skills Program are starting to be integrated into regular national government operations'.
	The program has made tangible contributions to the strategic framework for TVET, to TVET system oversight, and service delivery at the provincial level, strengthening the TVET sector across all three dimensions. (Vanuatu 2015)
	The TVET Sector Support Program has 'transitioned TVET delivery from a supply to a demand led training model with industry support.'
	Stakeholders note 'considerable improvement in the TVET sector, both in terms of planning and delivery, as a result of the program'.
	The 'standard of teaching quality has been raised to recognised international levels'. (Kiribati 2015)
	APTC has influenced improved quality in Pacific TVET systems. (APTC 2014)
Improved outcomes for industry and graduates	APTC graduate employment rates are high (in the same occupations as training received) with many also obtaining higher wages and promotion.
	'APTC's close involvement with employers in program delivery has contributed to high levels of employer satisfaction with graduates.'
	'One-third of employers surveyed indicated they have gained significant benefits.' (APTC 2014)
	The majority of TVET for Tourism's provincial tourism business clients have made tangible improvements in product quality, increased revenue, and implemented formal management and administration processes:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68% now meet Vanuatu Tourism Operator Minimum Standards and are commercialised and sold online through provincial travel call centres 29% operate within the formal economy compared with only 9% in 2012. (Vanuatu 2017)
	Kiribati Institute of Technology – APTC pathways have effectively delivered Certificate III to institute graduates, improving employment outcomes. (Kiribati 2015)

KEY FINDINGS: QUALITY OF DESIGN AND TRANSITION TO IMPLEMENTATION

Evaluation question 2: What factors have contributed to, or constrained, the successful implementation of DFAT support for skills development in the Pacific and Timor-Leste?

Success factors

Quality design characteristics supporting effective implementation:

Participatory designs

- foster shared understanding of the development problem, program logic, and proposed actions
- demonstrate sound understanding of local context, including employer capacity to support workplace training, and local workforce literacy and numeracy levels
- give priority to local ownership and leadership and local capacity when searching for solutions and approaches to TVET reform. (Vanuatu 2015, Tonga 2018)

A plausible program logic

- evidence-based
- testable
- specifies clear objectives
- defines indicators to measure progress and achievement

Effective transition plan

- established and applied to facilitate smooth transition from design to implementation
- for example, ensures key staff and systems (planning, management information and MEL) are in place early

Flexible investments

- encourage ongoing, locally led reflection and learning for continuous adaptation and improvement
- include rolling annual planning processes to allow programs to identify and respond to opportunities. (Vanuatu 2015, Solomon Islands 2015)

An incremental, iterative, participatory and adaptive approach to both system and organisational change in Vanuatu is more likely to ensure changes are locally sustainable. (Vanuatu 2017)



Key findings: Quality of design and transition to implementation

Learning from experience

Lessons and opportunities, drawn from 10 years' experience in implementation and evaluations, have informed strategic development of APTC. The learning has contributed to recalibrating APTC's strategic direction, intent and approach in its third phase, which began in 2018.

The former Australia Pacific Technical College has transitioned to become the Australia Pacific Training Coalition, which includes shifting from a focus on direct service delivery to incorporating greater integration with Pacific TVET systems to:

- assist Pacific partners to provide their own internationally recognised training and achieve quality improvements in their institutions and systems
- build coalitions with like-minded reform champions, including peak industry bodies, the private sector and training institutions, to advance locally led TVET reform
- forge enduring pathways between skills development and employment (working closely with industry and enterprises in national and international labour markets).

To succeed, APTC must work in politically smart ways, be agile, responsive and entrepreneurial.



Key findings: Quality of design and transition to implementation

Challenges and limitations

Design characteristics that constrained successful implementation include:

1. Challenges relating to program logic, such as description of how change will occur was not specific or complete enough to define outputs, outcomes and indicators

Confusing mix of outcome, output and input indicators, a lack of clarity as to the relationship between expected outcomes and indicators. (Tonga 2012)

2. Objectives too ambitious and not matched with sufficient resources.

Objectives of policy reform were unrealistic given the two-year time frame. (Timor-Leste 2014)

3. Logic relied on underlying assumptions not supported in reality.

That training alone would lead to improved employment outcomes like increased mobility. (APTC 2014, Kiribati 2014)

4. Other design constraints:

- a. Failed to identify key features in relevant implementation context (partner commitment and capacity) or consider alternative options to achieve objectives. (Tonga 2012)
- b. Too flexible—designs lacked strategic purpose, with resources spread too thinly, resulting in unfocused implementation. (Solomon Islands 2015)



Key findings: Quality of design and transition to implementation

Supporting improved skills formation, employment pathways and labour mobility

The recommendations of the 2015 Independent Review of the Kiribati TVET Sector Strengthening Program informed the design and delivery of the new Kiribati Skills for Employment Program.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen program logic to better articulate shared understanding of how change will occur, and clearly define outcomes, outputs and activities.
2. Increase flexibility of TVET training profiles so investments respond to changes in international demand for specific skills (informed by a regional labour market and tracer studies, updated annually)
 - a. strengthen engagement with APTC, increase access to courses in hospitality, tourism and aged care
 - b. deliver additional training, including add-on skills and pre-departure courses, to assist workers and graduates' access labour mobility pathways.
3. Strengthen Kiribati Government's ability to coordinate I-Kiribati workers' access to international labour market opportunities.

The new program, drawing on the above recommendations, has led to improving international employment outcomes for graduates. As of July 2019, 88 I-Kiribati, including 57 women, are employed in Australia's hospitality, tourism and aged care sectors through the Pacific Labour Scheme.



KEY FINDINGS: EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Success factors

Close connection with the country context is critical. Factors supporting effective implementation include:

Deep and broad engagement with partner country TVET systems

'Ample evidence that aspects of the Program are starting to be integrated into regular national government operations.' (Vanuatu 2015)

'Program has ... made tangible contributions to the strategic framework for TVET, to TVET system oversight (Vanuatu 2015)

An increasing role for the private sector

including driving TVET relevance and quality in:

- identifying skills needs and standards
- TVET program (curriculum) design and delivery
- institutional and system governance and decision making.

... direct engagement with the private sector (from large firms to microenterprises) is impressive and in Phase 4 should be strengthened in ways that not only leverage additional resources to achieve Program objectives but demonstrate how effective private sector engagement can help improve a national TVET system. (Vanuatu 2017)

APTC's close involvement with employers in program delivery has contributed to high levels of employer satisfaction with graduates. (APTC 2014)

'High-quality key staff

- recruited, developed and retained high-quality key staff, including program staff, partner government staff, TVET trainers, DFAT program managers
- staff, including expatriate staff, 'embedded' in partner country context, using knowledge of local customs and traditions, appropriate language and other skills to better navigate policy discussion, build appropriate relationships and/or deliver appropriate training. (Tonga 2012, APTC 2014, Timor-Leste 2014, Vanuatu 2015, Solomon Islands 2015, Timor-Leste 2018, Tonga 2018)

Long-term continuity of both program personnel and DFAT personnel in program design, management, implementation and review allows for the growth of deep local knowledge and skills and the development of mutual trust between the program and its implementation partners. (Vanuatu 2017)

Improved coordination of TVET systems

through mechanisms involving key TVET system stakeholders, for example:

- government agencies
- TVET providers
- industry
- enterprises

Key findings: Effective implementation

Success factors

Improved coordination of TVET systems (continued)

Some evaluations saw opportunities to strengthen and further institutionalise national coordination mechanisms, for example by reviewing:

- roles and responsibilities
- membership to achieving better balance between public and private sectors. (Vanuatu 2017 and Tonga 2018)

Strong and productive relationships

Strong and productive relationships were established between development programs and country partners and these proved to be critical to success.

Consistent, regular, relevant and respectful two-way communication between development programs and country partners helps build consensus and facilitates the emergence of resilient local coalitions and leadership genuinely committed to better development outcomes. (Vanuatu 2017)

Collaboration cross-program and cross-donor

Graduate outcomes were likely to be improved when links were established between:

1. Bilateral and regional skills development investments:

Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT)-APTC pathways have been effective in delivering Certificate III to KIT graduates, and in thereby improving employment outcomes for these graduates. (Kiribati 2015)

2. Skills investments and other programs, for example:

- labour mobility programs
- domestic employment sectors (infrastructure, agriculture, tourism)
- gender equality initiatives.

The new skills program will... work closely with other Australian development programs to maximise linkages between labour mobility and development of commercial agriculture and domestic tourism opportunities. (Timor-Leste 2018)

Strategic and practical links that the Program has established with Australian-funded regional programs, especially the APTC and the Pacific Women program, and with New Zealand aid programs have been mutually-reinforcing. (Vanuatu 2017)

Key findings: Effective implementation

Challenges and limitations

To remain relevant, TVET systems must understand local capacity limitations, and respond and adapt to the changing needs of individuals, employers, the labour market and society.

In Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste the most significant issues included:

- TVET systems lacking the policy frameworks and information needed to respond flexibly to labour market demand. In small labour markets, this can result in an undersupply and oversupply of graduates, impacting on employment prospects.
- DFAT investments not appearing to facilitate or support detailed analysis of the demand for specific skills in Pacific island countries or in Australia.
- The widespread lack of labour market information for countries and the region. (Timor-Leste 2014, APTC 2014, Solomon Islands 2015, Tonga 2018)

There has also been a general lack of concern for the quantification of skills demand.

Labour market information is scarce and there has been little attempt, if any, to build a better understanding of the dynamics of the labour market. (Tonga 2012)

Better labour market analysis is required to support adjustments in the APTC training plan. (APTC 2014)



KEY FINDINGS: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Success factors

Fit-for-purpose MEL are more likely useful and used if they feature certain characteristics.

The most useful ones identified by the meta-evaluation were MEL systems designed with a clearly defined audience and clear purpose.

- For example, they generated credible information that informed learning, improvement and decision-making; and satisfied requirements of accountability for investment performance/progress.

Successful TVET programs used information collected to:

- build support for innovations or expansion
- foster partnerships
- share positive stories about DFAT's support
- enhance their reputation. (APTC 2014, Vanuatu 2017)

Successful investments focused on collecting the most important information:

- performance and results-based measures for key outputs and outcomes and aligned with clearly defined program logic.

MEL systems were only as complex as available resources and their capacity to collect, analyse and report information allowed (Kiribati 2015, Vanuatu 2015).

- Where the need for complex information exceeds capacity; alternatives such as engaging an independent external entity should be considered. (Vanuatu 2017)

Challenges and limitations

The less useful MEL systems:

- contained significant gaps
- were too difficult to implement for the context
- were non-existent early in implementation.

... did not include outputs, indicators or activities that would allow for management, monitoring or reporting on critical processes and outcomes. (Kiribati 2014)

... important gaps, were the lack of systematic information on the impact of training on the productivity of enterprises. (APTC 2014)

A complex MEL approach, constrained by poor data management systems and capacity meant that monitoring was mostly weak. (Kiribati 2015)

It took three months of a two-year program to agree on a monitoring and performance plan, which even then had not been shared with the partner government. (Timor-Leste 2014 and similar comments from Tonga 2018)

Vanuatu Skills Partnership: MEL system to the next level

The Partnership applied 2017 evaluation recommendations to make technical improvements to the MEL system.

Examples:

- Developed a plausible program logic that clearly distinguished between outputs, outcomes and impacts, and supported adaptive management (reflection and learning, political economy analysis).
- Increased allocation of resources, focused on collecting and analysing data on key outcomes directly attributable to partnership outputs.
- Improved data on the impact on training participants, such as enabling routine collection of business growth and employment data (disaggregated for gender, island and disability).
- Expanded and embedded responsibility for MEL data collection and use across all partnership personnel, beyond the specific MEL team.
- Strengthened information management systems in preparation for connection with the partner government system (Vanuatu Education Management Information System).
- Presented key information in formats that increase stakeholder and/or partner accessibility and usage (infographics).

KEY FINDINGS: GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Success factors

Some programs showed commitment to achieving gender equality outcomes through:

- breaking down gender stereotypes by encouraging women's participation in training for non-traditional occupations (APTC, 2014)
- improving women's economic empowerment through supporting women to set up social enterprises and providing related training, including financial literacy (Vanuatu 2015)

Challenges and limitations

Integrating gender equality and social inclusion into investment design is key to strengthening an investment's related performance during implementation, for example:

- analysing and assessing different interests, priorities and roles
- identifying specific outcomes, actions and measures.

More equitable TVET participation and access to its benefits remains challenging. Significant barriers persist for certain groups to enter non-trade qualifications including:

- women
- people with disability
- people in remote locations.

In most investments, gender equality was only expressed in terms of gender-disaggregated data on training participation.

Four programs reported gender-disaggregated data for program staff and trainers. (APTC 2014, Kiribati 2015, Vanuatu 2015, Tonga 2018)

Reporting on inclusion of people with disability was largely limited to measures of participation, though some evaluations reported on providing accessible infrastructure.

Over time, there were indications of a shift from a 'light touch' approach in design and implementation to an approach emphasising gender equality and social inclusion as core strategic development issues.



Key findings: Gender equality and social inclusion

Breaking down gender stereotypes in skills training

APTC has a strong commitment to gender equality and has important achievements to show for it.

Females tend to be concentrated in non-trade qualifications, but APTC has achieved success in enrolling women in three non-traditional occupations (APTC 2014).



Vanuatu Skills Partnership: achieving economic outcomes for women

Some investments are increasingly reporting on economic outcomes for women.

Vanuatu Skills partnership with Pacific Women (2018 Partnership Update)

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership with Pacific Women has led to many success stories, such as the Malampa Handicraft Centre. This centre is a community-based social enterprise established in 2015. It has more than 300 members (90% women) who produce handicraft products such as jewellery, woven baskets, wood and stone carvings, and textiles.

In 2018, members participated in skills development activities such as workshops on product design, production and financial literacy. They also received individual coaching and mentoring.

DFAT completed a comparative analysis in November 2018 of income earned by a subset of 49 members (46 women) who sell their products to the centre.

Between January and October 2018 this group of producers earned 400% more income from sales to the Malampa Handicraft Centre than they did during January to December 2017.

KEY FINDINGS: IMPROVING DFAT ASSISTANCE

Evaluation question 3: How can DFAT improve assistance for skills development to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness?

DFAT skills development investments are learning and adapting in response to lessons learned through implementation and applying evaluation findings.

More recent investments point to potential for significant contributions to improved relevance and quality of TVET provision in Pacific TVET systems (especially Tonga 2018, Vanuatu 2017, Kiribati and APTC designs). However, improvement is not consistent or systematic.

This meta-evaluation provides little valid evidence on the extent to which DFAT's earlier support was relevant to future skills needs of partner governments, the private sector or graduates in the region.

Very few evaluations were able to make credible, robust assessments of progress toward, or achievement of, investment outcomes based on the data that was available.

Improve ongoing relevance of investments

As Australia's support for strengthened TVET provision progresses, it is important that Australia and its TVET system partners balance servicing local labour markets needs and facilitating increased graduate mobility.

While Pacific island governments support individuals to travel and work overseas, countervailing forces exist in governments and industry because of 'skills drain' concerns.

DFAT's skills investments must be flexible and responsive to:

- changes in the political economy
- changing needs of labour markets
- lessons learned.

DFAT must apply:

- adaptive programming
- strong MEL
- strong risk management systems.

DFAT must anticipate and respond to fast-changing labour market demands including for new skills like digital, entrepreneurial, and green energy. DFAT should:

- invest only in TVET programs that demonstrate labour market demand and reasonable employment prospects for graduates
- ensure investments facilitate and/or make available detailed analysis of the demand for specific skills in Pacific island countries and Australia.

Key findings: Improving DFAT assistance

Improve effectiveness of investments

The meta-evaluation identified opportunities for improvements across the aid management cycle.

DFAT should work with key stakeholders to:

Enhance evaluation quality

- Ensure all investments, from early implementation, are guided by a plausible program logic and use robust monitoring and evaluation plans and systems.
- Focus evaluation plans more strongly on the precision, logic and level of the key evaluation questions.
- Systematically share different and credible evaluation instruments developed by skills development programs, such as tracer studies, employer surveys, graduate experience surveys.
- Open the possibility of cross-program comparisons to enhance evaluation quality and gain efficiency benefits.

Enhance investment-level MEL system quality

- High-quality MEL products ensure information generated from investments is credible and informs important programming decisions and wider learning.
- The quality of investment-level MEL systems appears highly variable.
- This suggests that DFAT officers may have variable levels of understanding of MEL systems.
- ODE's 2018 Review of DFAT Investment Level Monitoring Systems identifies findings that align with this meta-evaluation and recommends actions for improving investment-level monitoring.
- Work already underway to implement these recommendations will have flow on benefits for TVET investments, along with all other aid investments.

Key findings: Improving DFAT assistance

Improve effectiveness of investments (continued)

Enhance investment design quality

Quality investment design has flow-on effects. It can facilitate or constrain quality of implementation, including monitoring and evaluation.

Noting more recent improvements in designs, DFAT must ensure all skills development design processes and products reflect internally agreed better practice, including by:

- ensuring all new designs draw on labour market analysis where available to underpin investment rationale and inform strategic investment priorities
 - or, in implementation, work with appropriate stakeholders to facilitate or undertake and make available detailed analysis
- incorporating a sound understanding of local context, including employer capacity and literacy and numeracy levels of the local workforce
- ensuring all new designs integrate gender equality and social inclusion as a core strategic development issue
- engaging in meaningful participation of local partners and stakeholders
- fostering ongoing improvement through reflecting, learning and adapting
- ensuring plausible program logic with clearly defined objectives, key outputs, indicators and key evaluation questions.

Provide greater strategic clarity

DFAT has an opportunity to develop a coherent, long-term vision for its skills development engagement in the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

This will help focus energy and resources in the same direction over the next 10 years by setting out:

- a clear rationale
- investment priorities
- principles
- approaches.



Key findings: Improving DFAT assistance

Improve DFAT aid management capability

One gap in the information available for the meta-evaluation was analysis of the role and capabilities of DFAT staff commissioning and managing the skills investments.

Successful investments rely on effective investment managers who, for example, are capable of:

- establishing strong and productive relationships
- holding quality policy dialogue
- collaborating with other programs.

Skills program managers relayed challenges in effectively monitoring and evaluating programs while implementing a busy program schedule.

The quality of aid management of skills development investments could be improved by positioning investment managers to effectively deliver core roles and responsibilities by being appropriately:

- prepared (through targeted training, coaching and experience)
- supported (through a strong performance culture that supports effective monitoring and access to ongoing technical support).

DFAT could strengthening mechanisms that facilitate improved communication, coordination and collaboration between officers managing DFAT's skills development investments. This could include:

- targeted formal and informal training
- ongoing access to technical expertise
- shared knowledge and lessons of good practice in investment design and implementation
- economies of scale to address more complex and persistent challenges, such as quality of MEL systems and analysis of labour market skills demands.



Key findings: Improving DFAT assistance

Good practice TVET investments

- Build on long-term engagement in the sector, and maintain strong local partnerships, including with counterpart governments, other TVET providers and private sector employers.
- Understand context, including local and international labour market needs, employer capacity and workforce literacy and numeracy levels, and adapt training programs as required.
- Appropriately resource key elements of the performance framework, including investing in a realistic design appropriate to context, and ensuring relevant data is available and used to measure performance over time.
- Support the development of skilled and experienced local and Australian DFAT staff with knowledge in the sector to build relationships, engage in policy dialogue and promote continuous program improvement.
- Ensure equitable participation in training programs by women, people with a disability and people in remote locations.
- Strategically link bilateral programs with opportunities presented at the regional level, including through APTC.



Good practice TVET investments ensure equitable participation in training programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To further strengthen DFAT practice in designing, implementing and evaluating skills development investments, the meta-evaluation recommends four achievable actions:

Recommendation 1

DFAT update and promote the existing 'Skills for Prosperity in the Australian Aid Program' Investment Guidance Note, including to:

- emphasise that all new designs include political economy analysis and provisions for detailed labour market analysis to underpin the investment rationale and inform strategic investment priorities
- emphasise that all new designs should integrate gender equality and social inclusion as a core strategic development issue
- articulate an approach to partnerships, including objectives and principles for collaboration
- articulate an approach to enhance the coherence between bilateral and regional programs

Recommendation 2

1. DFAT build the capacity of skills investment managers, including:
 - better addressing the technical information needs of program managers to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of skills development investments
 - strengthening mechanisms for capacity development, learning and knowledge sharing among DFAT officers managing skills development investments

Recommendation 3

The Office of the Pacific consider how best to support labour market analysis in Pacific island countries, Timor-Leste and Australia including to identify future labour market needs in the region and better inform TVET programming.

Recommendation 4

The Office of Development Effectiveness to pilot an evaluability assessment of a TVET investment, including to: test program logic and objectives; assess availability of information and performance data sources; and review allocation of resources for monitoring and evaluation.

ANNEX 1: KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Has DFAT's support for skills development been relevant?

1. Has DFAT's support for skills development been relevant to different users (including learners, employers and partner governments)?
2. To what extent has DFAT's support for skills development contributed to meet the skills requirements for domestic, regional and international labour markets?

What factors have contributed to, or constrained, the successful implementation of DFAT's support for skills development in the Pacific and Timor-Leste?

1. What types of results has DFAT's support for skills development been able to achieve?
2. What factors have contributed to successful implementation of support for skills development?
3. What factors have constrained or challenged DFAT's support for skills development?

How can DFAT improve assistance for skills development to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness?

1. To what extent is DFAT's support for skills relevant to the future skills needs in the region?
2. Has, and how has, DFAT learned from previous skills development programs to improve design and/or implementation of DFAT's TVET assistance over time?

The meta-evaluation of TVET investments in the Pacific and Timor-Leste determined:

1. relevance of Australian support
2. results achieved through Australian support
3. factors that contributed to success
4. factors that constrained effectiveness
5. lessons learned to improve Australian support for skills development.



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