

**Independent Evaluation: Vanuatu Technical and Vocational Education and Training
Sector Strengthening Program
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE**

Initiative Summary

Initiative Name	Vanuatu Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector Strengthening Program		
AidWorks initiative number:	INK210 (Phase III)		
Commencement date:	5 September 2011	Completion date:	30 June 2016
Australian investment value:	A\$11.5 million	Other investment value:	Nil
Implementing partner:	Boxhill Institute of TAFE		
Other key partners:	Vanuatu Qualifications Authority; Ministry of Education and Training		
Country/Region:	Vanuatu		
Primary sector:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training		
Initiative objective/s:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To consolidate gains made to date at both provincial and national levels (re: facilitate decentralised TVET service delivery linked directly to provincial economic development outcomes) – To continue to strengthen national TVET systems development within the Ministry of Education and Training’s TVET Division, the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority and productive sector agencies and to ensure continuing convergence between program and Government of Vanuatu policy, practices and processes. – To expand the reach of program support through the establishment of more provincial centres (to coordinate the delivery of a range of accredited training and business development support services linked to provincial productive sector planning and priorities). 		

Evaluation Summary

Review Objective:

Based on program reports and internal monitoring and quality assessment processes, adequate information was available to assess the program as successful and warranting a fourth phase. To build on the information already available, this evaluation considered the impacts and value for money of the program since 2008 (over Phases II and III) and lessons learned in the decade since the start of Phase I (November 2005) that could inform the design of Phase IV.

The purpose of the independent evaluation was to identify factors driving the success of the TVET Sector Strengthening Program in Vanuatu and how these might be applied to future DFAT investments in Vanuatu and in other evolving, complex and uncertain environments.

The evaluation focused on three primary evaluation questions:

1. What impact has the program had since the commencement of Phase II (in June 2008)?
2. What can be learned about the factors driving the success of the program?
3. Has the program delivered value for money since it commenced in June 2008?

Review Completion Date: 22 July 2015

Review Team:

- Kaye Schofield, TVET specialist and Team Leader
- Mark Minford, Economist
- Dr Andrew Epstein, evaluation specialist

The independent evaluation team undertook a two-week field visit from 11-25 May 2015. Consultations were conducted in Port Vila and three provinces: Sanma, Malampa and Torba. A stakeholder feedback session was conducted and an aide memoire was presented to the Australian High Commission at the conclusion of the field visit.

Key messages

The evaluation identified eight key success factors:

1. value-chain approach;
2. decentralised service delivery;
3. M&E system;
4. communications and relationships;
5. sustainability framework;
6. links with other aid programs;
7. local leadership (locally owned and locally negotiated and delivered); and
8. ethical, values-based leadership (the team individually and collectively; how the program team conducts its work; the 'rules' it follows; the values it promotes; and the ethical standards it applies).

The evaluation identified eight lessons learned:

1. 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.
2. Cross-sector cooperation amongst a diverse range of public and private stakeholders is essential to the development of an effective TVET system; where this cooperation does not yet exist, it can be facilitated by programs that are sufficiently nimble to work at national, provincial and sectoral levels simultaneously to create critical breakthroughs.
3. A value-chain approach which links the formal and informal economies but which is grounded in the existing customary order of informality can be a powerful means of transforming sectoral skills development while also facilitating changed behaviour in both economies and fostering private-sector engagement in skills agendas.
4. Programs that focus on long-term transformations but persistently work day-to-day with the grain of local custom and culture rather than from an externally devised blue-print are more likely to achieve their outcomes and be sustainable.
5. An incremental, iterative, participatory and adaptive approach to both system and organisational change in Vanuatu is more likely to ensure those changes are locally sustainable.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The wider relationship between Australia and partner governments can be strengthened through actions that demonstrate a very long-term commitment to supporting a mutually agreed priority development agenda and in doing so opens up new opportunities to work cross-sectorally both in the country and regionally and enhances Australia's reputation as a trusted, committed, and knowledgeable development partner.

The evaluation also identified the following issues:

1. continuing system reform is needed;
2. sector-based strategies work and additional sectoral strategies should be developed;
3. the program should deepen and broaden engagement with the private sector;
4. the program should take the M&E system 'to the next level'; and
5. continue to link with other development programs where opportunities arise.

Overall response to the evaluation

DFAT welcomes the evaluation findings, particularly the lessons learned, and acknowledges the issues outlined above. DFAT will explore how the program can best address those issues, including through the design of Phase IV. In particular, DFAT acknowledges substantial progress over the last ten years on key aspects of Vanuatu's TVET system, but acknowledges the need for further reform. Key constraints for the program include a lack of funding to the sector and a lack of financial and non-financial commitment from the private sector to improve the relevance and quality of training.

The M&E framework for the Program was developed in accordance with DFAT's M&E Standards. DFAT has been satisfied with data collection and analysis under the program, and this information has been used for management decisions. DFAT is pleased that the M&E system has been identified as one of the key success factors of the program, but acknowledges there is always room for improvement. Some of the assessments of, and recommendations for, the M&E system may be unfeasible for the program, but will be considered during the design of Phase IV.

DFAT agrees or partially agrees with eleven of the thirteen specific recommendations. The two recommendations DFAT disagrees are due to inconsistencies with DFAT's M&E Standards or suggestions for M&E which may not be value-for-money.

DFAT was disappointed that gender equality and disability inclusiveness received little attention in the evaluation. The Program has devoted considerable time and resources to achieving gender equality and disability inclusiveness, with excellent results, and DFAT considers the work in these areas to be exemplary and potentially key factors behind the success of the program.

Response to specific recommendations

Recommendation 1: MoET and DFAT should task the design team for Phase IV of the Program to explore in depth if and how the Program could support a strengthening of Vanuatu's system for financing TVET during Phase IV in ways that will help the Government of Vanuatu achieve its TVET policy objectives

DFAT response: Agree

Reforming finance is the key to reforming the TVET system and is a priority (along with maintaining quality of training). As mentioned above, lack of funding for the sector is a key constraint. A research paper on financing TVET in Vanuatu (<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/financing-of-tvet-in-vanuatu.pdf>) noted "TVET providers are generally heavily reliant on Government and on donor countries... Uncertainties around future sources and levels of funding make planning and change difficult for TVET providers."

While the current program is pragmatic and innovative in securing funding (including through Public Private Partnerships), the financing of the sector as a whole needs to be strengthened. This will require ongoing policy dialogue with the Government of Vanuatu. This will seek to build on gains already made, such as GoV funding (through MoET) three positions for the Program (one in each of Sanma, Tafea and Torba province).

Recommendation 2: The Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), with Program support, should review the current roles and responsibilities of the Group and provide advice to MoET and DFAT on what changes (if any) may be needed to establish a more institutionalised national mechanism for the coordination of the TVET system.

DFAT response: Agree

While SAG members' roles and responsibilities need to be reviewed (and policy dialogue should be included), SAG meetings need to remain in some form as the Program's key mechanism for strengthening provincial-national coordination and communication.

Recommendation 3: The Government of Vanuatu should commit to developing a second sector strategy based on the value-chain approach used in the Program's tourism strategy, for implementation from the start of Phase IV of the Program.

DFAT response: Agree

A second sector strategy based on the value-chain approach is already in progress with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Phase IV will continue to implement the value-chain model and build on gains to date in building cross-sectoral initiatives, particularly in agro-tourism.

Recommendation 4: Building on its existing efforts, the Program should assist MoET in Phase IV to implement its private sector policy objectives by facilitating a deeper and broader engagement of private sector businesses in the Vanuatu TVET system in order to maintain training relevance and achieve a more sustainable funding base for TVET. In support, DFAT should consider ways in which its Governance for Growth program could work more closely with the Program to accelerate private sector economic growth.

DFAT response: Agree

The current program is already working with the private sector at the national level, recruiting industry people to be part of the coaching and mentoring activities, but also by encouraging the private sector to be an active member of VQA, to enforce quality at the training delivery level. The program is also working with the Governance for Growth program, for example on the implementation of a call centre in Sanma province. The program will continue to identify opportunities to assist MoET and work with the Governance for Growth program to facilitate further private sector engagement in the TVET sector.

Recommendation 5: MoET and VQA, with Program support, should consider the constraints to the growth of for-profit private TVET providers in Vanuatu and, where feasible, identify opportunities to address them in Phase IV.

DFAT response: Agree

The program has engaged the small number of for-profit providers in Vanuatu, particularly in the IT field. The lack of a private sector training market is an issue that Phase IV can explore in collaboration with VQA.

Recommendation 6: The Program should assign unique identifiers to all participants who complete baseline or participant outcomes surveys to assist the Program to track and analyse trends, and do all that it can to reduce blank and non-response issues in both surveys. This should be done for the remainder of Phase III as well as throughout Phase IV.

DFAT response: Disagree

This recommendation as stated is not feasible. Assigning unique identifiers to all participants would be costly and time consuming due to the geography and cost of travel to remote places.

The program will consider how to make survey responses as meaningful as possible, covering as appropriate sample size.

Recommendation 7: DFAT should ensure that the design of Phase IV is based on a program logic that clearly distinguishes between outcomes and impacts.

DFAT response: Agree

The evaluation was unable to adequately assess impact due to a lack of data. The Program's current M&E system is not designed to provide evidence of impact. The design of Phase IV will consider whether collecting data that will inform an assessment of impact is feasible.

Recommendation 8: DFAT should consider contracting an independent specialist firm to conduct an impact evaluation before the commencement of Phase IV (baseline), possibly again at midline, and finally at the end of the Phase.

DFAT response: Partially agree

DFAT will consider during the design of Phase IV the most appropriate options for assessing impact and where possible, impact evaluation will be built into the M&E plan for Phase IV. The program to some extent may rely on Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data, which is produced by the Government of Vanuatu roughly every five years.

Recommendation 9: DFAT should consider commissioning a formal value-for-money assessment at the end of Phase III, based on improved data on the Program's financial impact on training participants.

DFAT response: Partially agree

The program does not have the budget available to conduct this assessment, but the design of Phase IV will consider how best to assess value-for-money, including by using Government of Vanuatu data where that is available (eg. from the National Statistics Office, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management and other national and provincial agencies).

Recommendation 10: For Phase IV, the Program should modify the Participant Outcomes Survey to collect data from participants in all sectors during the follow-up and coaching process in relation to both accredited and BDS training, and focus on the extent to which participants are applying the skills and competencies learned in training, and identifying the barriers to doing so.

DFAT response: Disagree

It is geographically and financially unfeasible to collect data from all participants in all sectors. The current sampling approach, which has widespread acceptance within the M&E profession, is appropriate and adequate. However, as mentioned above, the design of Phase IV will consider options to improve data collection to demonstrate value-for-money and impact.

Recommendation 11: DFAT should review the current performance benchmark for the Program within the Australian aid investment plan for Vanuatu and either: (a) ensure that the Program's M&E system is able to provide an accurate assessment of it; or (b) revise the performance benchmark to allow accurate Program assessment of it.

DFAT response: Partially agree

The Aid Investment Plan (AIP) for Vanuatu was finalised and released on 1 October 2015. A draft version of this document was provided to the evaluation team to inform the evaluation. The AIP forms the basis of discussions with the Government of Vanuatu to negotiate a new partnership. Performance benchmarks will be updated on an annual basis to ensure they can be accurately reported against.

Recommendation 12: MoET and DFAT should task the design team for Phase IV of the Program to consider the value of initiating a collaborative research program in Phase VI which explores the role that local, ethical and values-based leadership is playing in improving governance and developmental outcomes in the TVET sector.

DFAT response: Agree

Recommendation 13: Over the next year, and throughout Phase IV, DFAT and the Program should identify further opportunities for cross-program and cross-donor collaboration at the intersection between the Program and other Australian-funded programs, especially infrastructure programs.

DFAT response: Agree

The Program works effectively across sectors, including with infrastructure programs, and with other development partners, such as the New Zealand Aid Program and the French Embassy in Vanuatu, and this proactive approach to partnerships is indeed one of the key success factors for the program. The Program will continue to identify and expand on these opportunities throughout the remainder of Phase III and in Phase IV.