

EVALUATION OF THE STRENGTHENING PACIFIC HEALTH LABORATORY SYSTEMS ACTIVITY

BACKGROUND

MFAT has supported the strengthening of Pacific health laboratory systems since 1981. The current funding arrangement began in 2012 and ends in December 2015. There are three programmes in place:

1. implementing a Regional External Quality Assurance (REQA) programme
2. delivering training for Pacific laboratory staff
3. supporting a Laboratory Quality Management System (LQMS) programme.

These programmes contribute to Pacific Island countries [PICs] overarching goal to provide quality medical laboratory services that are appropriate, affordable and sustainable to support diagnostic health services and delivery.

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the Pacific Paramedic Training Centre (PPTC) support has strengthened participating laboratories. It also assessed regional factors, drawing on the findings, to identify how MFAT might support the strengthening of Pacific laboratories in the future.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

Overall the Activity aligned well with PIC health system needs, including nationally identified needs for laboratory strengthening. The programmes were valued by PICs providing a good fit with their aspirations for building the capacity of their laboratories. The PPTC was also valued more by PICs than other providers, with its flexible and relational approach tailored to their contexts.

Laboratories were strengthened through these programmes, in particular government endorsement and student uptake in the Diploma in Medical Laboratory Science and increased compliance with World Health Organisation quality standards.

Evaluators considered that the Activity was implemented efficiently. Costs were modest given resource input. Furthermore, PIC stakeholders suggested that participating laboratories would be worse off without the support. Tongan and Cook Islands stakeholders highlighted its value in reducing human and health costs, particularly for NCDs.

The Activity contributed to workforce development and quality management systems that will continue beyond the support provided.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS COULD BE MADE?

In-country challenges had limited the effectiveness of programmes in some countries. There is mixed evidence on the PPTC's responsiveness to unique needs and challenges in some countries. However, the PPTC is considering how it might address these challenges.

Programme resources being strongly focused towards specific needs identified by different PICs might further enhance impact.

Minor improvements could be made including increasing transparency of how resources are targeted at a country level and strengthening of financial reporting.

**WHAT IMPROVEMENTS
COULD BE MADE?**

There were some issues with the sustainability of the laboratories. In-country factors might undermine results, in-country champions and ongoing system level commitment are required. Furthermore, the PPTC is vulnerable to external funding streams, presenting a risk to outcomes in the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluators recommended continuing support to the PPTC with consolidation of the monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure outcome indicators provide information required. Recommendations about the programmes focused on:

- re-emphasising the importance of systematic use of results through in-country training and consider strengthening processes for provision of REQA reports to stakeholders
- Prioritise LQMS visits to target high needs laboratories and provide different training approaches.

Other recommendations focused on teaching and training suggested potential changes such as tiered training, hands-on laboratory attachments for recent graduates and formal pre-and post tests for all specialty training courses.

OUR RESPONSE

MFAT is considering further funding support for this Activity. These are being considered in the design for the next phase.

DETAILS ABOUT THE EVALUATION

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Year published: June 2015

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