

EVALUATION BRIEF

TONGA EDUCATION SECTOR PROJECT (TESP) II INDEPENDENT PROGRESS REVIEW

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW

Several key assumptions underpinning design were over ambitious.

Human resources, institutional capacity, and political/institutional change were significant factors in progress achieved.

MET and donor partners had different expectations about the level of direct support donor partners would provide for TESP II.

Evaluating TESP II achievements was challenging owing to weak information management and reporting systems.

Progress in delivering on outputs was variable. Progress continued at the classroom level; the system level is less advanced.

Earmarked budget support proved challenging for MET. The review noted the significant leap for MET from former funding implemented using World Bank arrangements and heavy donor involvement.



ABOUT THE ACTIVITY AND REVIEW

The Tonga Education Support Project II (TESP II) supports Tongan Government's education policy. It builds on the first stage of the Tonga Education Support Programme, aiming to improve equitable access, improve early grade student learning outcomes and strengthen Ministry of Education and Training (MET) capacity. Funded by MFAT and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), TESP II ran from June 2013 to June 2016. MFAT extended the Activity a further three months to September 2016.

The review provides information that informed DFAT's decision about further funding basic education in its 2015 Aid Investment Plan. It also informed priority actions for the MET and development partners to achieve the outcomes within the timeframe available. It also provided information on sustainability of achievements.

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS WERE MADE?

The review recommended priorities for the remaining time of this Activity including:

- Improving planning, reporting and M&E
- Improving information gathering and management
- a professional development focus for teachers and principals to ensure difference for classroom learning.

It also recommended future support modality be two pronged: funding grants and salaries through general budget support, and funding discretionary initiatives through either earmarked budget support or project funding.

The funding makes a difference and should be continued. Any future support will require a more detailed, realistic analysis of key components of the programme.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

MET and donor partners worked to prioritise the remaining resources in line with the review recommendations. MFAT is currently designing future education support taking the Review recommendations into account.

DETAILS ABOUT THE EVALUATION

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FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION

WHAT HAS WORKED WELL?

Funding for the types of activities provided for under TESP II is needed, wanted and is generally being used effectively. The investment required in the education sector could not be sustained without continued funding. Some elements, including the planning processes associated with school based management, are now well established, supported and accepted. For other elements, in the early stages of implementation, it is difficult to be confident about sustainability.

Progress in delivering on outputs was variable. At classroom level there is evidence that the curriculum materials for teachers and students were available. Systems for teacher professional development and school based management were also in place and generally working. Access to these resources seems equitable across Tonga. These parts of TESP II appear to be well designed and have potential to make a difference to student learning.

The project was relevant in its design and the focus on early years, strengthening teaching and learning for all children. All components are necessary to raise student achievement but on their own, they are not sufficient without effective integration.

There has been some progress on initiatives relating to assessment, inclusive education, early childhood education and the Education Management Information System. At the system level, progress on increasing the proportion of teachers with teacher training qualifications, on teacher assessment, and on improving the capacity of the Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE), is limited. Refurbishment of TIOE and some schools has been long delayed.

WHAT COULD WORK BETTER?

Evaluating TESP II achievements was challenging owing to weak systems in the MET for managing information and reporting against its Results Framework. Furthermore, because of slow implementation, TESP II had just gained momentum in activities that were likely to make the most difference.

Expenditure was slow in the first year, while momentum was being generated. In the 2013/14 fiscal year, budget items, apart from grants for schools and ECE, were underspent. This was partly due to system slowness and partly to poor planning. There has been some acceleration in activity for 2014/15 although it still appears to well under budget.

Budget allocation for increased staffing was not fully utilised and little progress made in building capacity of staff. This was despite having an intended outcome of increased MET capacity and a recognition that there was insufficient management capacity.

Several of the assumptions underpinning project design were unrealistic. Change in the MET were not possible at the pace envisaged. More support was needed than what development partners were able to provide. At the higher level it was unrealistic to expect that student learning outcomes would improve in three years.

At this stage, it is impossible to demonstrate whether there were an improvement in learning outcomes as the results of the Standardised Test of Achievement in Tonga (STAT) for 2014 was not available. However, TESP II had only been in place for two years, which is too short a time to expect to measure impact.

EVALUATION INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM THE MFAT WEBSITE: WWW.MFAT.GOV.TZ

We welcome feedback. You can contact us at aidevaluation@mfat.govt.nz or via social media on @MFATgovtNZ