

EVALUATION OF THE VOLUNTEER SERVICE ABROAD CORE FUNDING ARRANGEMENT

BACKGROUND

The New Zealand Government has supported Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) since the organisation was established in 1962. The evaluation (May 2015) reviewed the three year period 2012-2014, during which time VSA reoriented its programme on the Pacific. The evaluation informed decisions about the current Activity design and funding arrangement for VSA (2015-2018). To do this, the evaluation considered the design, management and implementation processes. It also considered results and long term impacts of the Activity.

VSA is currently supported by a Grant Funding Arrangement (GFA) and guided by the geographic and investment priorities of the New Zealand Aid Programme. VSA works almost entirely in the Pacific region and Timor Leste mobilising New Zealanders to support relevant, locally identified and delivered development. VSA's work is also driven by the development needs of in-country partners in the Pacific.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

The evaluation found that the Activity design and VSA's approach to implementation contributed to the goal of improved quality of life in the Pacific. In particular, volunteer assignments contributed to the development of their partner organisations, helping to achieve development outcomes in economic development, public services and civil society strengthening.

VSA has clear and transparent communications with key stakeholders making the Activity relevant. VSA has a collaborative approach with MFAT, partner countries and organisations which results in alignment in the following areas:

- with MFAT development priorities
- responsiveness to partner country needs and

ongoing engagement and ownership by all involved.

Evaluators noted that VSA had cost-effective administrative and recruitment procedures and that those volunteers recruited were generally skilled and enthusiastic.

Volunteers achieve a range of intended and unintended results and assignment benefits can persist beyond completion. Volunteers were seen to bring a can-do attitude to development Activities; they established strong personal relationships and engaged with locals to develop contextually appropriate solutions to issues.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS COULD BE MADE?

The report noted that a new structured and collaborative planning process was introduced during the evaluation (which VSA would utilise in the subsequent phase). This process is different to the processes that were evaluated.

The evaluation found that VSA's time from assignment identification to recruitment and mobilisation was at times lengthy. Those interviewed expressed interest in identifying ways to improve efficiency in this area.

**WHAT IMPROVEMENTS
COULD BE MADE?**

As already noted, assignments can have impact beyond assignment completion. The evaluation considered there might be a risk that partner organisations will become dependent on VSA or supplement workforce capacity through assignments. It suggested that VSA adopt strategies that ensure assignments do not result in dependency.

The evaluation noted that the Activity could have stronger monitoring and reporting against development goals and for more meaningful measures of quality outcomes. Cross cutting issues were not always addressed consistently in assignment scope.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation identified a set of recommendations to inform future decision-making including:

- ensuring that MFAT and VSA continue to use a collaborative approach
- VSA continuing to build on its good partnership practices
- that MFAT and VSA agree, define and describe value for money indicators and means of verification
- the strengthening of monitoring and reporting against performance indicators and wider development goals and
- continuing to review and strengthen operational policies and procedures.

OUR RESPONSE

Recommendations are being considered as part of the design for the next phase.

DETAILS ABOUT THE EVALUATION

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