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# **Volunteer Service Abroad Core Funding Arrangement**



ALLEN+CLARKE



**NEW ZEALAND**  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE  
Aid Programme

### **Further details about the authors**

Allen and Clarke Policy and Regulatory Specialists Limited (*Allen + Clarke*) is a consultancy firm based in Wellington, New Zealand that specialises in evaluation, policy and programme development and implementation. A key component of our work is designing and undertaking evaluations to assess and inform programme accountability, development and improvement. Founded in 2001, the company is owned and managed by its two directors, Matthew Allen and Paul Houlston, and has a team of senior evaluation and policy practitioners, analysts and support staff. Our company works for a range of government and non-government agencies in New Zealand and internationally. More information about our work can be viewed on our website: [www.allenandclarke.co.nz](http://www.allenandclarke.co.nz).

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### **Image on the front page**

*Mobile café truck for Kabaira Girl's Vocational Centre in Kokopo, Papua New Guinea.*

*Photo credit: Lorena de la Torre*

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# Glossary

Bougainville	Bougainville Autonomous Region
GFA	Grant Funding Arrangement (the Activity); the overarching agreement between MFAT and VSA.
KEQ	Key evaluation question
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PNG	Papua New Guinea
Short-term assignments	VSA volunteer assignments of less than 12 months in duration, including UniVols assignments.
Standard (long-term) assignments	VSA volunteer assignments of 12 months or longer in duration.
ToR	Terms of Reference for this evaluation
VSA	Volunteer Service Abroad



# Abstract

In December 2014 Allen and Clarke Policy and Regulatory Specialists Limited (*Allen + Clarke*) undertook a formative evaluation of the MFAT funded Volunteer Service Abroad Grant Funding Agreement (“the Activity”). The primary purpose of this evaluation is to inform decision-making on the future delivery and funding of the VSA Activity beyond the period of the current GFA. To do this, the evaluation looks at the design, management and implementation processes, as well as the results and long-term impact associated with the Activity.

The evaluation describes and assesses how volunteer assignments are implemented and the benefits (intended and unintended) realised. The evaluation was informed by a comprehensive document review, and more than 80 New Zealand based and in-country interviews. Evaluation participants included MFAT officials, VSA staff, partner organisations and past and current volunteers.

The evaluation’s findings highlight the importance of clear and transparent communications, proactive engagement with stakeholders, and the role that strong relationships play in assignment success. Further, they highlight the many ways in which volunteer assignments contribute to the development of partner organisations, which in turn help achieve a range of development outcomes in the areas of economic development, and public services and civil society strengthening.

This report recommends strengthening the Activity design to better define the intended outcomes of the Activity. Strategies include enhancing operational procedures to ensure efficiency and relevance to changing development needs; continuing to coordinate efforts in the Pacific; more consistent approaches to addressing cross-cutting issues in assignment scope, strengthening results indicators and Activity monitoring to include more meaningful measures of quality outcomes; and value for money measures.



# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background and context

The New Zealand Government has allocated development assistance programme funds to Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) since it was established in 1962. Guided by the priorities of the New Zealand Aid Programme, VSA works alongside people in the Pacific, mobilising New Zealanders to support relevant, locally identified and delivered development.

## 1.2 Purpose, objectives and methods of the evaluation

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to inform decisions regarding the Activity design and future funding arrangements for VSA. To do this, the evaluation considers the design, management, implementation and results of the Activity.

Toward this aim, this evaluation considers the relevance of VSA activities in light of stakeholder priorities; the effectiveness and efficiency of VSA activities in achieving the desired development outcomes; the sustainability of results; and impacts resulting from the Activity.

The evaluation included a review of 24 documents, 18 separate assignment-site visits across 4 regions, and more than 80 interviews with partner organisations, current and past volunteers, VSA staff and MFAT and other in-country government officials.

## 1.3 Findings

The goal of the Activity is to contribute to improved quality of life in the Pacific. Overall, the design of the Activity and VSA's approach to implementation supports achievement of this goal.

The Grant Funding Arrangement (GFA) provides a framework for the Activity and sets targets for assignment type and sectors consistent with MFAT's development priorities. In particular, VSA works with MFAT to agree on priorities; beneficiary countries to identify needs; and partner organisations to identify assignments. This collaborative approach results in alignment with MFAT development priorities, responsiveness to current and emerging needs in-country, and ongoing local engagement and ownership. It should be noted that, during the current Activity implementation period, MFAT introduced a more structured and collaborative planning process which includes development of standardised and detailed Activity design documents. Consistent with current MFAT practice, it is anticipated that this new process will be adopted for the next phase of VSA Activity implementation.

VSA policies and administrative procedures support on-going engagement with key stakeholders, and therefore ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the Activity.

VSA administrative and recruitment processes secure skilled and enthusiastic volunteers in a cost effective way. However, the time from assignment identification to volunteer recruitment and mobilisation can be lengthy. MFAT, VSA, partner organisations and volunteers all expressed interest in identifying opportunities to improve efficiency in this area





without significant cost increases or compromising relationships and assignment effectiveness.

VSA volunteers achieve a range of intended and unintended results. They bring a can-do attitude to development activities, establish strong positive relationships, and are able to engage with people to develop contextually appropriate solutions to local issues. Their achievements are assignment specific, and consistently contribute to increased individual and organisational capability. The evaluation also identified examples of volunteer assignments contributing to positive change for communities and industry. Some assignment benefits persist beyond assignment completion, but there is an ongoing risk that partner organisations will become dependent on VSA volunteers or supplement workforce capacity through assignments. As such, there is a concurrent need for strategic partnerships to make assignments more effective, and also for VSA to adopt strategies that ensure this does not result in dependency.

## **1.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the evaluation has identified a set of recommendations to inform future decision-making on funding and design of the Activity beyond the current GFA. These recommendations are:

- Ensure MFAT and VSA use a collaborative approach for future Activity design.
- VSA should continue to build on good partnership practices and capitalise on existing in-country resources.
- MFAT and VSA should agree, define and describe key value for money indicators and means of verification.
- Strengthen monitoring and reporting against performance indicators and wider development goals.
- Continue to review and strengthen operational policies and procedures.

Detailed recommendations and strategies to strengthen Activity design are further discussed in Section 8 of this report.



## 2 Evaluation purpose and approach

The following section details the evaluation's purpose, report structure, and methodology.

### 2.1 Evaluation purpose and report structure

The purpose of this formative evaluation of the Activity is primarily learning and improvement. In keeping with MFAT's evaluation requirements, the report informs decision-making on the funding and design of the Activity beyond the current GFA period. Specifically, this report:

- identifies the current and anticipated need for volunteering in the Pacific
- describes VSA activities and achievements in the Pacific according to the key evaluation questions (c.f. Section 2.2);
- comments on the merit and value of these achievements in relation to development in the Pacific; and
- provides recommendations to improve the implementation of the Activity and options that could meet the identified needs.

This report provides accountability, contributes to the evidence base on the difference the Activity makes in the wider Pacific region, and captures lessons for MFAT, VSA, and partners organisations. The report is structured as follows:

- Section 3 provides background about VSA, the GFA, and contextual information on development and the volunteering environment in the Pacific region.
- Section 4 presents the evaluation findings according to Activity design and management; Activity implementation and sustainability; and Activity results. The sub-sections include outcome statements answering each of the 22 evaluation sub-questions (c.f. Appendix 1). Each sub-section provides a summary, analysis of the evaluative evidence, and future considerations to inform design and delivery of the Activity. Evaluation findings from Section 4 are also summarised in a Results Table (c.f. Appendix 3).
- Section 5 reports against the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria for the evaluation of development programmes.
- Section 6 outlines evaluation conclusions presented with reference to the key evaluation questions (KEQs).
- Section 7 presents lessons learned relevant for future Activity design and implementation.
- Section 8 provides recommendations to inform future decisions for MFAT and VSA regarding design and implementation of the Activity beyond the current funding period.



## 2.2 Methodology

A variety of methods were used to collect evidence for the purpose of answering the following key evaluation questions:

- KEQ1: How well designed and implemented is the VSA Activity to achieve its intended results now and into the future?
- KEQ2: To what extent is the VSA Activity making a sustainable difference for the intended beneficiaries including partner organisations, partner countries and citizens, and the New Zealand Aid Programme?
- KEQ3: Which aspects of the Activity, both intended and unintended, are generating the most valuable (social, economic, cultural, environmental) results for beneficiaries, and which aspects might be improved and how?

A full list of sub-questions is provided in Appendix 1.

The table below summarises the methods used, the sources that provided the information, and how the data were analysed.

**Table 1. Activity evaluation methods, information sources and analyses**

Method	Information sources	Analysis
<b>Interviews / small group discussions</b>	MFAT officials (n=17) VSA New Zealand staff (n=5) VSA programme manager / officer (n=7) partner organisations (n=21) current VSA volunteers (n=27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thematic analysis coded according to KEQ, emerging themes and identified sub-questions</li> </ul>
<b>Focus groups</b>	MFAT officials (n=1) VSA officials (n=1) VSA alumni volunteers (n=1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thematic analysis coded according to KEQ, emerging themes and identified sub-questions</li> </ul>
<b>Sense-making sessions</b>	VSA volunteers (n=5) VSA volunteers and partner organisations (n=5) VSA country-staff (n=1) VSA officials (n=3) MFAT officials (n=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thematic analysis coded according to KEQ, emerging themes and identified sub-questions</li> <li>• concerns, issues or errors noted and investigated</li> </ul>



Method	Information sources	Analysis
<b>Document review</b>	Grant Funding Arrangement (n=1) VSA MFAT Collaboration Agreement (n=1) OECD <sup>1</sup> reports (n=3) VSA governance, planning and strategy documents (n=6) VSA 2014 individual country/region strategies (n=6) VSA annual reports (n=3) other VSA reporting documents (n=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• documents identified</li> <li>• information synthesised according to the relevant evaluation questions and subsequently to emerging themes and identified sub-questions</li> </ul>

Evaluation participants were selected to provide a variety of perspectives from across the Pacific region, by sector, organisation type, and position within organisation. In-country fieldwork was conducted in Kokopo, Papua New Guinea; Bougainville; Samoa; and Port Vila and Luganville, Vanuatu.

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<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.



## 3 Background

This chapter provides contextual information about VSA and the Grant Funding Arrangement (GFA) and an overview of development and volunteering in the Pacific.

### 3.1 Overview of VSA and the Grant Funding Arrangement

The New Zealand Government has allocated development assistance programme funds to Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) since it was established as an incorporated society in 1962. The GFA between VSA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), known also as the Activity, covers the period from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2015. The total Activity funding for the GFA period is NZ\$23,700,450.

The GFA commenced following a transition year (2011-12) when, at the request of MFAT, VSA refocused its volunteer programme almost entirely to the wider Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> VSA programmes in the Pacific and funded under the Activity include: Papua New Guinea (PNG), Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Bougainville), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Timor-Leste. The Polynesia programme includes Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands, and Kiribati in Micronesia.<sup>3,4</sup>

VSA's work is guided by the priorities of the New Zealand Aid Programme and driven by the development needs of in-country partner organisations. The sectoral focus and objectives agreed with MFAT for the 2012-15 GFA were: improved economic development (50-60%), improved management and governance of public services (30-40%), and supporting a stronger civil society (10-20%) in the wider Pacific Region.

VSA's Council meets five times per year. It agrees on, and provides strategic oversight for implementation of the Activity and reports to members at the Annual General Meeting.<sup>5</sup>

VSA establishes relationships with regional and central government agencies, local and national non-government organisations, education and health bodies, individual colleges and business enterprises in both the Pacific and New Zealand. Through these relationships VSA

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<sup>2</sup> VSA documents use the terminology "wider Pacific Region" referring to the current Activity focus countries including Timor-Leste. On the infrequent occasions where "Pacific Region" is used in this document it is understood that Timor-Leste is not included.

<sup>3</sup> VSA began working in Tokelau in 1987 but has not had a volunteer placed there since May 2013. In addition, depending on priorities the Activity may incorporate volunteer assignments in Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands, by trading off volunteer assignment numbers in Melanesia.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of the evaluation, VSA was in the process of scoping a renewed core programme in discussion with the Government of Fiji.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the VSA Council please see: <http://www.vsa.org.nz/about-vsa/meet-vsas-ceo-and-council/>



identifies, develops and manages a range of volunteer assignments that contribute to capacity building<sup>6</sup> and development outcomes.

This evaluation considers the first phase of Activity implementation since the refocus to the Pacific. In this period, VSA has implemented a range of measures to improve organisational transparency and strengthen governance and management arrangements. During this phase VSA has also developed and revised policies and procedures to support the refocus, and has made significant investments in relationship building.

### 3.2 Development and volunteering in the Pacific

Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) remain highly dependent on international aid in a region where there are few donors. According to the OECD, Australia is the biggest total dollar contributor in the Pacific region while New Zealand is the biggest contributor in terms of allocation as a proportion of overall aid budget.<sup>7</sup> Historically, Australian bilateral funding in the Pacific region has focused on social sector support programmes (approximately 70 percent of funds), with around 12 percent allocated to economic and production sector assistance. In contrast, New Zealand allocated roughly 50 percent of development assistance to the social sector support and more than 30 percent to the economic and production sectors.

Contributors have invested significant effort in well targeted and coordinated aid delivery across the Pacific region in an effort to bolster progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>8</sup> However, reports from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat indicate there has been mixed progress toward the 2015 deadline. In particular, progress toward the environmental sustainability goal is behind schedule or off track for the majority of PICs.<sup>9</sup> Other development concerns include:

- gender equality, child mortality and maternal health, and environmental sustainability
- climate change, natural disasters and drought
- specific regions with acute need in areas such as poverty, hunger, primary education, and HIV and other diseases
- economic development
- institutional strengthening, governance and civil society support.

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<sup>6</sup> VSA defines capacity building as “the process through which individuals, organisations and communities obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time”.

<sup>7</sup> Development aid at a glance statistics by region available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/6.%20Oceania-%20Development%20Aid%20at%20a%20Glance%202014.pdf> (accessed February 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Cairns Compact <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/The%20Cairns%20Compact.%20Info%20Flyer.pdf> (accessed 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2012, *Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report*, Suva, p.4.



The Activity and Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) programmes funded by MFAT and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (respectively) are two of the largest volunteer programmes in the Pacific region. The Peace Corps also has a significant programme, while Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) has a reduced presence in the Pacific region focusing its activity almost exclusively in PNG and Bougainville.

Currently there is a degree of overlap between the volunteer agencies in terms of country and sectoral focus. In addition, there is a level of consistency in assignment offerings (length and sectoral focus) as illustrated in the tables provided in Appendix 2. This suggests there is an opportunity to strengthen collaboration across agencies and build upon networks and local intelligence to improve outcomes.



## 4 Findings

The following chapter details the findings of the evaluation in relation to:

- Activity design and management
- Activity implementation and sustainability; and
- Activity results.

These findings are also summarised in a Results Table in Appendix 3. The table includes outcome statements (*'what has been achieved'*) according to specific evaluation questions, how consistently the evidence supports these statements (using an anonymised, numerical coding system), and suggested next steps.

### 4.1 Activity design and management<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.1.1 GFA support of development priorities<sup>11</sup>

##### **Evidence**

The New Zealand Aid Programme's priorities, outlined in the Strategic Plan 2012-15, are "to support sustainable development in developing countries in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable, and prosperous world." The current GFA clearly reflects and aims to achieve these development priorities by focusing on improved economic development, management and governance of public services, and supporting stronger civil societies within the wider Pacific region.

**The current GFA supports VSA alignment to MFAT's development priorities.**

The data collected from a range of sources were largely consistent in illustrating how the current GFA supports these priorities, particularly in terms of volunteer selection. Data presented in VSA's annual reports from 2011 to 2014 showed that volunteers were working within the three specified priority areas. Assignments completed in the 2013-14 period were also within the agreed range for economic development, slightly under for public sector and slightly over for civil society focused assignments.

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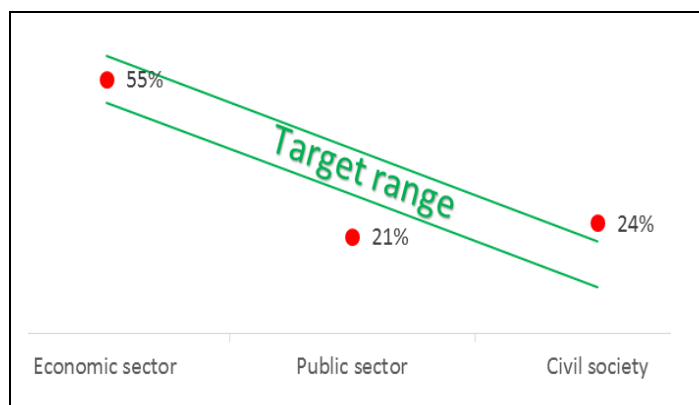
<sup>10</sup> KEQ1: 'How well designed and implemented is the VSA Activity to achieve its intended results now and into the future?'

<sup>11</sup> Sub-evaluation questions: 'Is the Activity in its focus and operations relevant to current and future aspirations (of MFAT as funders and VSA partner organisations/countries as the primary intended beneficiaries) for Pacific development?' and 'Is the Activity aligned with wider MFAT policy and development objectives?'



**Figure 1. Volunteer assignments across sector areas for 2013-14.**

***VSA volunteer assignments in the 2013-14 period closely matched GFA targets, and reflect MFAT's development priority areas.***



Quantitative evidence that VSA staff and volunteer assignments focus on MFAT sectoral priorities is consistent with findings from interviews and documentation reviewed. Qualitative evidence from interviews, focus groups and feedback sessions indicated that the focus areas were reasonably broad and considered easy to accommodate. No one reported problems scoping, developing or undertaking assignments that did not easily fall into one or more of these areas.

***Analysis***

The current GFA stipulates the number of volunteer assignments and sector area targets thereby ensuring the Activity is aligned with and framed by MFAT's priorities for development.

***Future considerations***

It is important to maintain current practices supporting Activity alignment with MFAT priorities. This should include collaborative design, regular interagency engagement, and joint assessment of progress. Future designs should also include more clearly defined measures of medium-term outcomes. This would help better determine achievement of these outcomes and their degree of contribution to the overall Activity goal.



#### 4.1.2 VSA support of development priorities<sup>12</sup>

##### **Evidence**

Evidence from a range of documents and interviews showed VSA policies and procedures support a consistent vision and goal.

VSA's Strategic Intent 2011-15 outlines clear organisational priorities and expectations for ensuring local relevance and buy-in to volunteer assignments.

Specifically the document notes priorities on how volunteering services should focus on the context and local and national development plans.

**VSA policies and administrative procedures around assignment identification support goal achievement.**

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) is developed with each partner government in the countries where volunteers are placed. These MoUs underpin all in-country activities and ensure VSA assignments are undertaken as part of a legitimate operation aligned with the development priorities of the partner countries.

Country strategies reflect nationally identified priorities and are used to guide assignment selection. These strategies reflect current and forecasted needs. The VSA Assignment Management Handbook and a series of standardised partner and assignment assessment forms are used to deliver a programme that meets these needs. In particular, these forms outline objectives and priorities related to VSA's Results Management Diagram. They also identify the personal characteristics and experience required of volunteers, as well as the organisational characteristics desirable of partner organisations (e.g. goals, priorities, governance) and the assignment (e.g. resources available, living and working situation, risks).

Interviews, with few exceptions, supported the view that current and past volunteer assignments address(ed) development priorities in the specific organisation and/or their community, and, by wider reference, the Pacific.

##### **Analysis**

Evaluation evidence indicates that VSA is meeting the four International Volunteer Program Association's Principles and Practices criteria (pre-program, program, post-program, and organizational operations).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'In what ways do VSA and MFAT Activity management, governance and operations support relevance and coherence of the Activity with wider development policies?'

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.volunteerinternational.org/principles.html>

Further, VSA is consistent with how its policies and procedures meet organisational and development goals across each of these four areas.

**Future considerations**

Continued alignment between policies and administrative procedures is important to ensure an organisation's success. As such, in the future it will be important that VSA's policies and procedures continue to clearly identify and support development goals, and assignment selection is needs driven, collaborative and focused on achieving targets and addressing priorities.

**4.1.3 Activity alignment with wider development objectives<sup>14</sup>**

**Evidence**

The information gathered consistently showed that the Activity is aligned with MFAT's priorities. This alignment was supported by various Activity processes, and was evidenced through a range of VSA documents. For instance, VSA's 2011-15 Strategic Plan and other supporting documents developed since 2011 formalise closer engagement between MFAT and VSA and support alignment of the Activity with the New Zealand Aid Programme. These documents include:

**VSA processes support good alignment with wider MFAT policy and development objectives, and support collective efforts towards a common aim.**

- the VSA – MFAT Collaboration Agreement outlines alignment of goals, outcomes, priorities, regular informal and formal interactions and joint assessment of progress in meeting objectives of accountability, independence, partnership and cooperation
- the International Programme Unit Strategy 2011-15 links VSA country strategies with VSA's strategic intent and brings together development plans and New Zealand Aid Programme priorities; and
- VSA's Triennial Plan development goal, outlined in the results management diagram, is the same as the New Zealand Aid Programme's mission listed in its respective strategic plan.

Processes related to the development of VSA country strategies also enable alignment with Activity objectives and goals. In-country

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<sup>14</sup> Sub-evaluation questions: 'In what ways do VSA and MFAT Activity management, governance and operations support relevance and coherence of the Activity with wider development policies?' and 'Is the Activity aligned with wider MFAT policy and development objectives?'



programme managers work with VSA staff in Wellington to develop country strategies that provide a framework for operations in each programme. The strategies draw on VSA in-country knowledge and data such as the Human Development Index; MFAT's Joint Commitment for Development<sup>15</sup>; the New Zealand Aid Programme's strategy; and national level development strategies. These strategies provide a basis for in-country operations, support alignment with priorities of the intended beneficiaries of the Activity, and represent long-term plans to support the country's development goals.

Interviews with MFAT officials highlighted perceptions that VSA's (new) governance and management arrangements support successful alignment between VSA and MFAT by focusing on common objectives. The majority of MFAT officials interviewed were satisfied with VSA's alignment with the New Zealand Aid Programme; many also believed the roles held by VSA volunteers were broadly aligned with the country level objectives. These views were confirmed by VSA representatives interviewed during the evaluation. In contrast, partner organisations and VSA volunteers were generally unaware of the connection between MFAT development objectives and how these aligned with VSA priorities and processes.

Although the majority of individuals conveyed satisfaction with the degree of current involvement between VSA and MFAT staff, several MFAT officials and volunteers suggested that formalising involvement between the two organisations' operational staff could be beneficial to support alignment in order to build relationships, share learning, and celebrate achievements. Similarly, focus group participants suggested that both partner organisations and volunteers would benefit when learnings are shared and when working towards a common goal.

Finally, some stakeholders noted that sensitivities remain between MFAT as a donor agency and VSA as a prominent international development non-government organisation. There is a natural tension between VSAs objectives as an independent organisation and the requirement to be responsive to the needs of MFAT and the objectives of the New Zealand Aid Programme, as their primary funder. However, VSA views MFAT as its most strategic partner and is committed to engaging openly with MFAT to discuss issues related to Activity alignment and branding.

### **Analysis**

It is encouraging that both MFAT and VSA, although independent, seek to align their policies and objectives. It is also encouraging that in-

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<sup>15</sup> JCfDs are discussed and agreed bilaterally between MFAT and partner governments in the Pacific and identify the sector areas of focus for NZ Aid Programme support.



country staff within these organisations work together whenever possible. For social change to occur at a group or societal level, it is important that multiple efforts are coordinated and the focus remains on the desired outcomes. Otherwise, isolated cases of impact may occur, and these cases would likely be due to chance rather than planning.

**Future considerations**

There is potential for closer alignment between VSA and MFAT through the Activity. At a minimum, high-level documentation (e.g. future GFAs) should ensure VSA and MFAT continue to support one another to achieve the same goals and contribute to one another's successes. Sensitivities around branding, identity and alignment of development objectives also need continued attention when agreeing on future funding arrangements for the Activity.

**4.1.4 Cross-cutting issues and objectives<sup>16</sup>**

**Evidence**

The evidence showed that MFAT's priority cross-cutting issues (human rights, gender and the environment) are identified in VSA assignments when relevant. However, there is a lack of clarity, consistency and monitoring of how these issues are addressed through the Activity.

**Cross-cutting issues are addressed in some roles, and policies and administrative processes can be developed to further support this priority across all assignments.**

The document review showed that the approach VSA takes to cross-cutting issues is not well articulated. VSA's current and draft constitutions cluster cross-cutting issues under a human rights pillar, and VSA's 2011-15 strategic intent and the majority of country level strategies make no mention of these issues. Further, where country strategies, (e.g. PNG and Solomon Islands), make reference to cross-cutting issues as New Zealand Aid Programme priorities, no analysis is provided of how these might be addressed. Further, no clear relationship exists between cross-cutting issues and short-, medium- or long-term objectives outlined in VSA development goals within the country strategies.

Conversely, operational documents such as VSA's Assignment Management Handbook outlines key questions on cross-cutting issues as

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<sup>16</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'To what degree and how effectively are volunteer assignments addressing issues of human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment, and the environment?'



part of a checklist for partner assessments. In addition, VSA has established a Climate Change group to ensure that it 'walks the talk' to address environmental issues (VSA Activity Monitoring Assessment 2013). Specific examples of assignments addressing cross-cutting issues are provided in VSA's 2012-13 Annual Report, and the VSA 2013-14 Annual Report includes a table of assignments across the six programme sectors, indicating the relationship to cross-cutting issues.

However, there was inconsistent evidence of how cross-cutting issues were addressed. For example, partner organisation selection forms and assessment criteria, include action on human rights and environmental sustainability, but the assignment assessment forms do not formally address how volunteers' roles will or will not address these issues. Further, Programme Reports annexed in annual reports (c.f. VSA 2013-14 Annual Report) do not consistently reference cross-cutting issues across assignments.

Similarly, interview findings showed inconsistencies with the degree to which assignments address cross-cutting issues. Few volunteers and partner organisations were able to clearly articulate how assignments addressed issues such as gender equity, human rights and the environment. Some volunteers indicated that their assignment did not address cross-cutting issues at all. The exception was where it was the explicit function of the assignment or organisation, (e.g. where volunteers worked on sexual health, domestic violence or environmental issues).

**Case study 1. Evidence of an assignment addressing cross-cutting issues human rights and gender equality.**

"...Traditionally we sisters are only for working in the missions, teaching nursing and that...[We] never realised that we could do also things like that [i.e. protection orders, appearing in court] ...but we would not be able to do that today if we did not have that [VSA volunteer] lawyer. Only because she came and trained us we know how to do it... When she was training us, she asked the magistrate that we all go to the courthouse and learn how to speak in court and things like that."

-Sister Lorraine, Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre, Chabai



**Analysis**

Addressing gender inequities and achieving environmental sustainability are key development needs across the wider Pacific region. The UN Development Programme indicators highlight that these needs are



particularly acute in Melanesia and Micronesia, but Polynesia and Timor-Leste also face many of the same challenges to a lesser degree. Although VSA assignments support community-based change, competing priorities and lack of capability and capacity sometimes means that a concentrated focus on cross-cutting issues is deferred.

**Future considerations**

As noted previously, it is important that efforts are coordinated and focused on the desired change. Further success will be achieved by clear articulation of priorities in all strategic and operational documentation and by clarifying expectations on how—individually and collectively—volunteer assignments address cross-cutting issues. This will help to ensure that cross-cutting issues are a key component of operational procedure (e.g. assignment selection, assignment descriptions, and volunteering reporting) and are prioritised across all assignments.

**4.1.5 Activity relevance to development needs<sup>17</sup>**

**Evidence**

Various VSA policies and administrative procedures illustrate how the organisations respond to locally identified development needs.

This was best evidenced in VSA country programme strategies. For example, the Bougainville 2014 Strategy identifies the need to support sustainable economic development (SED) in rural communities where growth has been stagnant. Similarly, the Timor-Leste 2014-15 Strategy highlights the unique challenges of working in a post-conflict environment and the barriers associated with meeting long-term development goals.

**The Activity focus is relevant to current regional needs, and volunteer assignments address these needs on an individual level.**

Interviews with partner organisations and volunteers confirmed Activity relevance to development needs in terms of the value and importance of the volunteer support provided. Partner organisations and volunteers perceived that volunteer services were necessary for the partner organisations' further development.

In contrast, interviews showed that VSA staff, MFAT officials and volunteers held mixed views of the Activity's focus on SED outcomes for

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<sup>17</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'Is the Activity in its focus and operations relevant to current and future aspirations (of MFAT as funders and VSA partner organisations/countries as the primary intended beneficiaries) for Pacific development?'



assignments. Although many stakeholders suggested that volunteer assignments were relevant to both the current and future aspirations of the country, some interviewees suggested that needs were greater than those being addressed within civil society, economic development and public sectors.

**Analysis**

Across the Pacific, progress toward MDG targets has been slow and a broad range of development needs still exist. Issues such as gender equity, child mortality, maternal health, infectious and non-communicable diseases and environmental sustainability remain a concern. Melanesian states are reported to have the most acute needs, but countries across the wider Pacific region also have significant development needs in New Zealand Aid Programme priority sectors (i.e. economic development, and institutional, government and civil society strengthening). Volunteer programmes in the Pacific provide an opportunity for a large number of individuals to work on a diverse range of these issues at the community level.

**Future considerations**

The 2015-2019 New Zealand Aid Programme Strategic Plan was under development while this evaluation was being finalised. The Plan will outline the strategic focus and programme priorities and inform MFATs approach to funding the Activity. It is important that volunteer assignments and supporting strategic frameworks continue to reflect and are responsive to current and emerging needs in the Pacific. As such, VSA should continue to build on current relationship management and partnership engagement practices; maintain consistent and well-aligned policies; and further strengthen administrative procedures to best support locally-driven development.

**4.1.6 Assignment scoping and recruitment<sup>18</sup>**

**Evidence**

Evaluation findings suggest that assignment scoping processes are largely effective. Engagement between VSA and partner organisations allows for responsive programming that meets partner organisation needs and the wider development objectives of the Activity.

**VSA operational processes around assignment scoping and recruitment are mostly effective though not always efficient.**

The documentation

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<sup>18</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'How effective are processes for ensuring assignments are jointly scoped by VSA with the partner organisations?'





reviewed supported the view that policies and administrative procedures provide baseline criteria and guidance with enough flexibility for operational process to vary.

Stakeholder interviews indicated that the assignment process was iterative, collaborative, and effectively supported matching local need with the right volunteers. Programme managers were seen to use local knowledge when considering contextual or situational issues to determine the suitability of some assignments. All partner organisations agreed that the skills volunteers brought to their assignments were necessary and valued.

However, other evidence suggests the process is not always efficient (c.f. Figure 2). Interviews with partner organisations and programme managers suggested, for example, that the length of time required for the assignment scoping process can take up to 12 months. This view was reflected by some volunteers, who perceived both the recruitment and departure process as lengthy. Volunteers noted delays in their mobilisation due to issues such as medical clearances and waiting to attend a VSA briefing, which occurs every 8-10 weeks.

**Figure 2. Length of time between recruitment and departure for volunteers recruited in 2011-2013, contrasted with median length for short-term and long-term volunteers.**



The view regarding possible inefficiencies with recruitment and volunteer deployment processes could not be confirmed by monitoring data. However, delays in volunteer briefing and mobilisation were reported in the VSA 2013-14 Annual Report and other internal documents. VSA



noted that volunteer deployment for short term assignments usually takes less than three months. For long term assignments, especially in difficult to recruit for locations, the deployment process can take from six to eight months. Delays occurred due to passport renewal times, medical and dental clearance, phased vaccinations/immunisations, wait times in between volunteer pre-departure briefings, the availability of hosts or external contractors to provide in-country orientation.

It is clear VSA is interested in decreasing the length of time required between volunteer recruitment and deployment. VSA's 2013-14 Annual Report outlines various methods currently being developed to decrease wait times. These include categorising and forecasting future assignments and locations in terms of past volunteer application numbers; improved publicity; and focused recruitment campaigns.

### ***Analysis***

Current operational processes related to assignment development are robust and relevant to partner organisations and by proxy regional needs. The collaborative approach to assignment development ensures relationships are established between VSA and partner organisations. The inclusive and iterative approach to assignment scoping ensures that multiple views and a range of needs are considered.

As noted previously there are a broad range of development needs across the Pacific and issues such as vulnerability to natural disasters, climate change and the resultant rising sea water are likely to become more urgent priorities while many of the existing challenges such as gender equity remain.

### ***Future considerations***

In future, it will be important for operational procedures to continue to support the identification of local needs and development of relevant assignments. Although resource dependent, greater efficiency may be achieved through VSA's continued improvement around recruitment and deployment processes (e.g. assignment forecasting, targeted recruitment and publicity campaigns, new approaches to increasing medical clearance turnaround). Further, establishing more strategic partnerships with partner organisations may encourage increased ownership of the assignment development process and therefore faster turnaround times.

#### ***4.1.7 Recruitment processes<sup>19</sup>***

### ***Evidence***

The evidence shows that VSA is cost effective in identifying, recruiting

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<sup>19</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'How does VSA ensure skilled and experienced volunteers are recruited for relevant assignments?'



and matching volunteers with the requisite character, skills and experience to partner organisations and assignments.

VSA interviews indicated that their recruitment unit builds upon established relationships and VSA's reputation to procure high-quality, free or reduced cost recruitment services. This includes reduced prices for advertising space for volunteering assignments in newspapers (e.g. Sunday Star Times) or online (i.e. Federated Farmers). In addition, VSA's returned volunteers include many highly skilled professionals with industry and technical expertise who support VSA with the development of assignment descriptions and recruitment processes.

**VSA recruitment processes secure the right volunteers in a cost effective way.**

Additionally, VSA has a team of in-house professional interviewers to provide robust interviews. The strength of this process is evidenced by regular reports noting that volunteers are a good match for assignments in terms of skills, attitude and personal attributes. The volunteer alumni focus group and individual volunteer interviews supported this view, noting that the comprehensive process ensures the people best placed to undertake the assignment are recruited.

Analysis of VSA's recruitment documents confirmed the effective use of networks and operational systems in the recruitment process. In addition, VSA's 2013-14 Annual Report refers to increasing numbers of registrations. These are attributed to a new, integrated communications strategy and recruitment campaign launched in June 2014; VSA's business transition programme focused on enhancing the recruitment database; and other systems and hardware changes.

***Analysis***

VSA meets the International Volunteer Program Association Principles and Practices (c.f. Section 4.1.2), particularly relating to securing the right volunteers. Recruitment materials are clear and include clearly defined criteria for professional requirements and personality characteristics necessary for a volunteer's success.

***Future considerations***

As noted above, development needs in the Pacific are anticipated to grow in the future. Although the needs may change, it is paramount that the right volunteers are placed in positions. In the future, it will be important that recruitment procedures further enable local needs to be met in a time-efficient way while maintaining priorities around identifying the 'right volunteer'.



## 4.2 Activity implementation and sustainability<sup>20</sup>

### 4.2.1 Activity outputs<sup>21</sup>

**Evidence** VSA has delivered on the intended key Activity outputs as stipulated by the GFA. Targets met include: agreed number of short-term and standard volunteer assignments; managing partnerships and relationships; and monitoring the capacity built and people trained through volunteer inputs. In particular, there is relatively consistent evidence of VSA’s success in achieving measurable outputs.

The monitoring data suggests VSA has delivered well against the majority of its intended outputs and assignment targets for the current GFA. The current GFA, for example, requires a mix of standard (12 months or longer) and short-term assignments; 65 percent and 35 percent, respectively. Based on figures provided in VSA annual reports, the table below indicates slight variations in short-term and standard assignment types against targets, with a marginally lower proportion of assignments being of a short-term rather than standard duration.

**VSA delivered on many intended Activity outputs.**

**Table 2. Total number and percentage of standard and short-term assignments across the current funding period.**

Assignment type						
	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
<b>Standard</b>	77	62%	103	62%	112	61%
<b>Short-term</b>	47	38%	63	38%	72	39%
<b>Total</b>	124	100%	166	100%	184	100%

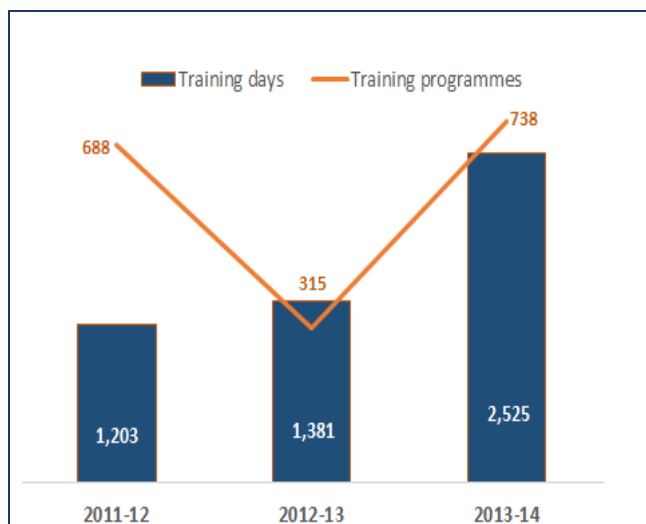
The table also indicates increasing numbers of volunteer assignments across the wider

<sup>20</sup> KEQ2: ‘To what extent is the VSA Activity making a sustainable difference for the intended beneficiaries including partner organisations, partner countries and citizens and the NZ Aid Programme?’

<sup>21</sup> Sub-evaluation question: ‘How well have VSA delivered on their intended outputs and short-term outcomes?’



Pacific region, with a total of 474 assignments reported between 2011 and 2014 and an average of 158 assignments per annum during this period. The GFA target of 507 assignments from 2012-15 is likely to be achieved by the end of 2015. Further, as shown in the figure below, the VSA 2013-14 Annual Report indicates the organisation is tracking well towards Activity outputs in terms of increasing numbers of training days and capacity building components delivered by volunteers.



In 2013-14, volunteers provided significantly more training days than the previous two years, as well as delivered more training programmes during their assignments. VSA noted “the increase in training days over the three year period is consistent with the increase in the number of volunteer assignments” (p.13).

**Figure 3. VSA volunteer training days and programmes, 2011-14.**

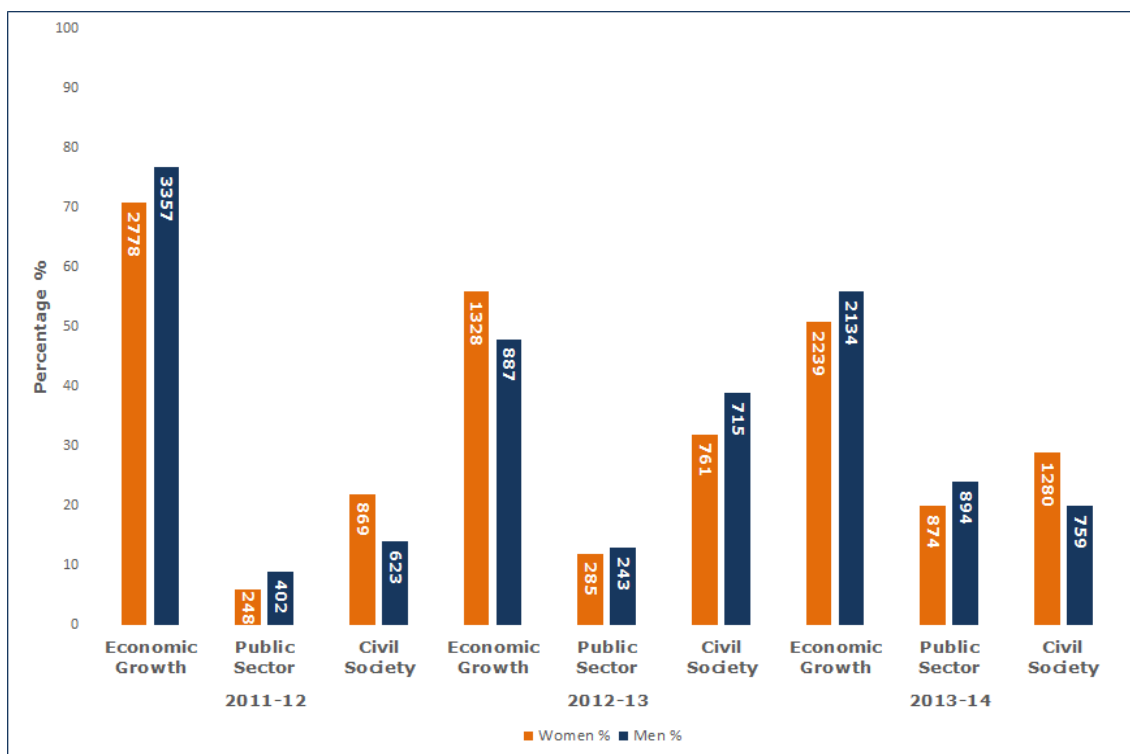
The following table (overleaf), also based on annual reports, shows that between 2011 and 2014 the majority of training days and programmes contributed to economic development outputs (54 percent, consistent with the GFA sector target), with the remainder spread between public sector (22 percent, slightly below the related GFA target) and civil society (25 percent, slightly above the GFA target).

**Table 3. Total number and percentage of assignments across the current funding period by sector.**

Assignment Numbers by Sector								
	Economic Growth		Public Sector		Civil Society		Totals	
<b>2011-12</b>	73	59%	25	20%	26	21%	124	100%
<b>2012-13</b>	98	59%	32	19%	36	22%	166	100%
<b>2013-14</b>	101	55%	38	21%	45	24%	184	100%



**Figure 4. Percentage and number of women versus men trained by VSA volunteers across three sector areas between 2011-14.**



Partner identification, selection and relationship management also form an essential part of meeting the GFA’s specified outputs for effective relationships with partner organisations, host governments and institutions. Findings suggest that relationships forged between programme managers and partner organisations remain at the centre of VSA’s work. According to VSA’s 2013-14 Annual Report, the beginning of the current GFA saw VSA establish 199 new partner organisation relationships (2011-12). In subsequent years (134 in 2012-13 and 81 in 2013-14) VSA has taken a more strategic approach to partner identification focusing on “fewer, bigger, deeper, longer partnerships as has been indicated by MFAT to be a priority for development work” (pg. 16).

Interviews with VSA staff, partner organisations and volunteers confirmed the aforementioned data regarding VSA’s focus on and degree of success with developing effective partner organisation relationships. In nearly every reported case, the relationship between VSA volunteers and partner organisations was characterised as strong.

### **Analysis**

The New Zealand Aid Programme's Mission statement is Supporting sustainable development in order to reduce poverty and contribute to a



more secure, equitable, and prosperous world. VSA volunteers support these goals by living and working within communities, developing relationships and building local capability of partner organisations to continue the work and support their communities after they leave.

**Future considerations**

Sustained efforts will be required for VSA to source assignments that continue to achieve measureable outputs and outcomes. It is recommended VSA continues to ensure capacity building activities are closely monitored and provide reliable data. This may involve further discussions with volunteers around the importance of and rationale for collecting monitoring information, or the establishment of clearer parameters around what constitutes capacity building indicators.

**4.2.2 Volunteer achievements<sup>22,23</sup>**

**Evidence**

Findings from interviews, in-country partner organisation documentation and site visits suggest that VSA volunteers have consistently positive effects and develop both individual and organisational capabilities within partner organisations. In a number of cases, there were also tangible and direct impacts on the communities.

VSA volunteers felt they were successful at achieving short-term capacity building outcomes with very few exceptions. This corresponds with documentation such as VSA's 2013-14 Annual Report, which presents various desirable short- and medium-term outcomes from a range of VSA assignments (pg. 45).

Partner organisations and volunteers considered that volunteers' individual-level capacity building efforts also helped strengthen organisational capacity. Volunteers assisted local staff, often beyond a nominated local 'counterpart'<sup>24</sup>, and built skills in a wide range of areas in response to locally-

**VSA volunteer achievements are varied, assignment specific, and consistently contribute at the individual and organisation capability levels and in some cases at the community or industry levels.**

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<sup>22</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'How well have VSA delivered on their intended outputs and short-term outcomes?'

<sup>23</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What are the most significant changes/outcomes being achieved or are likely to be achieved over the longer term through the Activity for beneficiaries?'

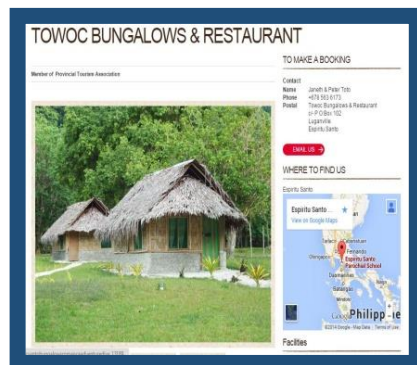
<sup>24</sup> Counterparts include individuals, organisations and communities. VSA recognises that capacity building may occur across any or all of these levels.



identified needs. The reports showed that volunteers built local capabilities in areas such as:

- Information Technology: assisted individuals to provide more transparent, effective and/or efficient business processes, supporting economic development and public services (reflecting achievements in 4 assignments).
- Education: enabled school staff to better respond to individual students learning and/or communities' information needs, supporting civil society and public services (reflecting achievements in 3 assignments).
- Tourism: supported individuals and organisations to engage with the tourism industry as a source of income, and government staff to open up tourism opportunities for locals promoting civil society, public services and economic development (reflecting achievements in 4 assignments).

### Case study 2. Evidence of volunteer assignment achieving community capacity building



*In a country where copra prices have dropped, the volunteer encouraged locals to see tourism as a business, generating income and employment opportunities, supporting individuals to keep their land. The tourism website provided free marketing exposure and a booking system for locals, who do not have access to computers. The downstream implications are increased living standards for locals as increased tourism brings increased income earning opportunities.*

The interviews with partner organisations and volunteers also showed that, in some assignments, success was realised by the volunteer developing systems and processes for partner organisations. These types of assignments often required the volunteer to 'do the job' rather than to build individual capability. Examples of achievements included:

- Agriculture: identification, development and/or implementation of successful farming approaches, supporting economic development (reflecting achievements in 2 assignments).



- Waste Management: development of waste systems, supporting the local economy and environment (reflecting achievements in 1 assignment).
- Management: development of plans, policies and/or procedures demonstrating good business management and financial practices, supporting economic development and civil society (reflecting achievements in 4 assignments).

**Case study 3. Introducing sustainable waste management practices to improve the environment and benefit local schools**



*VSA volunteer Mary O'Reilly worked closely with two local government partner organisations to improve waste management practices in Luganville and even generate income earning opportunities. Waste was previously burnt, left to rot or dumped on vacant lots. There are aluminium recycling points around town, a large compost facility at the local market and New Zealand-based organisations, Croxley Recycling and Pacific Direct Line (PDL) shipping company accept used toner cartridges and provide paper to local schools by way of reimbursement.*

Gathering evidence of Activity progress toward medium-term outcomes proved more challenging. This was not unexpected, due to the evaluation being conducted during the first stage of the Activity since its refocus to the Pacific. The evaluation team did observe some achievements extending beyond the short-term, including:

- More effective and efficient public service: development of waste/recycling systems that enabled a public service department to be financially self-sufficient and returned resources to participating families at markets and schools (reflecting achievement in 1 assignment).
- Strengthened governance and improved civil society leadership: establishment and documentation of systems to allow effective delivery of services across a greater number of people, who may not have access to these due to geographical restraints (reflecting achievement in 1 assignment).
- More productive enterprises: the volunteers used information technology to increase the visibility of local tourism operators and connect potential tourists with local operators through the internet. Success was evidenced by increased internet traffic and, in one case, hotel bookings (reflecting achievement in 3 assignments).



- Increased employment opportunities: volunteers assisted the partner organisation establish a business in fresh produce, growing salad greens to supply local hotels and resorts. The garden now employs five full-time individuals (reflecting achievement in 1 assignment).

**Analysis**

VSA volunteer achievements, although assignment specific, showed consistent contributions to building individual and organisational capability. Short- and medium-term outcomes are necessary for meeting longer-term development objectives in the economic, public service and civil society sectors. As such, volunteer assignments provide a solid foundation for host communities to meet their development objectives.

**Future considerations**

It would be valuable to further build upon these successes, allowing opportunities for VSA staff and volunteers to reflect on and learn from achievements. However it is also essential to periodically review the factors that prevent assignments success and consider how these might be mitigated or managed.

**4.2.3 Assignment ownership<sup>25</sup>**

**Evidence**

Interviews with volunteers illustrated their dedication to and ownership of assignments. Volunteers were consistently positive and motivated to succeed and expressed the desire to deliver the outcomes outlined in their assignment descriptions. Many volunteers voiced frustration that they were not achieving their assignment objectives quickly enough. However, there was also broad recognition that developing relationships in a cross-cultural environment and developing country context takes time, thereby impacting on the pace of achievement.

**Volunteers owned assignments more than partner organisations.**

Similarly, the majority of partner organisations recognised the value that volunteers brought to their organisations. Partner organisations placed particular value on the capacity of volunteers to adapt and respond to and meet current organisational needs, and largely viewed volunteers' assignment success in these terms.

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<sup>25</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What is the extent of partner organisation (especially in-country) ownership of assignments and achievement of the assignment objectives throughout volunteer assignments and beyond?'



These qualitative findings are corroborated by the VSA 2013-14 Annual Report. In this document, volunteers perceived that they were less successful in areas such as skills exchange and capacity building than their partner organisations perceived them to be. The report attributes this variation to the high personal expectations for success volunteers hold for themselves.

The degree of assignment 'ownership' varied between partner organisations, volunteers and VSA. Some partner organisations accepted a large degree of responsibility for their volunteers and assignments (e.g. provision of organisational protocol orientations, regular work plan meetings), whereas other partner organisations relied more on volunteers for direction and advice. Sometimes work plans were developed in conjunction with partner organisations and volunteers; other times VSA volunteers drafted their own work plans and presented them to the partner organisation. In one instance, a programme manager developed work plans with both the partner organisation and the volunteer at the outset of the assignment to reach agreement and achieve traction towards achieving success. This was not evidenced in other cases, where assignment management was understood to be the volunteers' responsibility unless something went wrong.

Some volunteers reported that their partner organisation did not monitor their achievements, as the partner organisation viewed this as the responsibility of the volunteer. Further, negotiating assignment tasks and ensuring alignment with the key objectives was more-often-than-not the responsibility of the volunteer.

Last, there was inconsistent evidence regarding shared monitoring responsibilities between volunteers and partner organisations. Some volunteers reported completing their VSA monitoring reports in close collaboration with their partner organisation. Other volunteers reported only showing their partner organisation the completed form, and other volunteers reported not involving their partner organisation at all.

### ***Analysis***

Needs often change in development contexts. Emerging priorities and contextual factors (e.g. political instability) can make assignment tasks moot, and can redirect the focus away from prioritised development objectives. This is particularly true if partner organisations identify the volunteers as being there only to support their organisational needs rather than broader development objectives. Greater success can be achieved if partner organisations, volunteers, and assignments all focus on the agreed development objectives.

### ***Future considerations***

Contracts between VSA and partner organisations should ensure agreed development goals are the focus of volunteers' assignments and associated tasks. Operational practices can support this making collaborative work planning at the commencement of each assignment



standard practice thereby ensuring on-going alignment between assignment goals, scope, tasks, and development objectives. Where assignments need to be re-scoped or the focus changed this should involve VSA, partner organisations and volunteers. It would also be beneficial for partner organisations to more regularly monitor and report success according to wider development objectives.

#### 4.2.4 Assignment benefits<sup>26</sup>

##### **Evidence**

The data show inconsistent results regarding the sustainability of assignment benefits.

Some partner organisations interviewed reported sustained outcomes and successful results from volunteer assignments. In particular, they observed that individual counterparts trained in their organisations were still actively using the knowledge or systems provided by the volunteer. Reported benefits included ongoing ability to support victims through the legal process and continued use of databases to reach out and/or advertise to local communities. Partner organisations confirmed that these benefits were still being achieved; this was corroborated by current volunteers working with these partner organisations.

**Some assignment benefits persist after assignments end, and building local knowledge and appreciation of assignment benefits support this success.**

Additionally, some of the volunteers who had undertaken more than one assignment reported that partner organisations were still benefiting from their previous assignment. For example, partner organisations were continuing to use materials produced as part of volunteers' assignments and sharing pertinent information with communities.

Conversely, some partner organisations reported that volunteers' work was not continued. An IT system, for example, required specific skills to maintain the highly technical IT infrastructure which was not available locally. As part of another assignment, the volunteer provided training on agricultural techniques not traditionally used by locals. It is understood that the past habits of the individuals prevailed over training, and the old techniques came into use again.

A few volunteers were also unsure of the sustained benefits of their

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<sup>26</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'Do benefits of assignments persist after assignments end, and what factors assist or hinder these benefits?'



assignments, and perceived that VSA reporting systems do not currently support collection of this information. This may be due to lack of follow-up with partner organisations after the assignment is completed, or perhaps less of a focus on capturing this type of information than other monitoring data.

**Analysis**

The financial, environmental and social sustainability of assignment outcomes and the ongoing contribution of these assignments to wider development objectives is dependent upon a number of factors. The breadth and depth of volunteer-partner organisation engagement, varying levels of contribution from stakeholders, and the value of the assignment itself all determine long-term uptake.

**Future considerations**

Monitoring should be further strengthened to understand how assignment outcomes can be sustained. It is also important to consider locally-available capabilities to enable and sustain capacity building and development efforts. Increased focus on discussing and agreeing the potential benefits of assignments between volunteers, partner organisations and counterparts will help foster a shared understanding and collective buy-in to development efforts.

In the future, it will be worthwhile to consider how contractual levers and operational processes can be further developed to deliver more consistent sustained results. Volunteer contributions and expected assignment benefits should be collaboratively agreed between all parties (VSA, partner organisation, volunteer).

**4.2.5 Dependence on volunteer support<sup>27</sup>**

**Evidence**

The evidence suggests that dependence on VSA volunteers by partner organisations remains a risk. Some partner organisations view volunteers as integral to their organisational sustainability and longevity. For example, a few partner organisations reported that they would struggle to exist without their volunteers, and others reported that some volunteer-initiated activities and practices had ceased when the

**Partner organisations' dependence on VSA volunteers as supplementation remains a risk, and there is scope for improvements to better manage this risk.**

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<sup>27</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What processes are in place to manage the risk of dependence on VSA volunteers or use of volunteers as supplementation?'



assignment ended due to issues such as capacity and capability constraints. Several volunteers shared this perspective, and many in technical or specialised positions had concerns that they were just 'doing' the job rather than supporting others to carry out the work.

However, there are a range of VSA systems and processes available to help manage this risk, particularly via volunteer assignment management. These managerial tools include the Assignment Management Handbook; standardised partner and assignment assessment forms; assignment descriptions; and engagement and monitoring strategies to discuss current assignment activities with partner organisations and volunteers. According to various stakeholders, processes and procedures such as these ensure that dependence issues, such as partner organisations using volunteers to supplement their workforce, are regularly assessed by programme managers. In particular, frequent reminders are provided to volunteers about making sure they focus on capacity building rather than providing 'in-line' support. In addition, issues related to supplementation are resolved with the partner organisations directly.

***Analysis***

There will always be challenges associated with beneficiaries' dependence on development assistance and use of volunteers as supplementation. This is particularly the case when technical or specialised skills in local regions are lacking or cannot be taught or transferred within the scope of a single assignment.

***Future considerations***

Dependence on VSA volunteers can be mitigated by a continued focus on robust assignment management practices and engagement between programme managers and partner organisations. VSA might also consider trialling new approaches to volunteering such as introducing a programme providing opportunities for locally engaged volunteers twinned with/mentored by VSA volunteers. The rationale for this approach is creating on the job learning opportunities, particularly for young people, within partner organisations where there is an existing relationship. It is anticipated such an approach would lead to development of individual capability, develop a new cadre of skilled locals and potentially promote a local culture of volunteering that would build on the wider development objective of civil society strengthening. It is also expected that such an approach would increase the employability of local volunteers.



#### 4.2.6 Beneficiaries and Activity support<sup>28</sup>

##### **Evidence**

The evidence was generally consistent in demonstrating how partner organisations would have developed over time if they had not received Activity support.

Overall, partner organisations generally viewed VSA and volunteer support under the Activity as pivotal to their successful development and organisational longevity. This included mention of both strategic partnerships between VSA and partner organisations as well as relationships between volunteers and their partner organisations. Several anecdotal examples were provided during interviews outlining how partner organisations benefited from assignments. These include volunteers' assistance with stabilising organisational operations through marketing, communications and management, and capacity building with counterparts.

**Partner organisations considered VSA and volunteer support under the Activity as a pivotal and positive contributor to their organisations' development.**

Results from the document review generally supported the aforementioned partner organisation perspectives. Various VSA annual reports indicate progress towards all Activity objectives, including achievements in training and capacity building, partnerships and relationships, and cross-cutting issues. Further, the Timor-Leste review conducted in 2014 indicates that the majority of partner organisations consulted for the review found the systems and processes (e.g. checklists, manuals, reference material) developed by volunteers useful, and indicated that these operational practices were still in use after assignment completion.

The fieldwork interviews suggest that factors supporting continued organisational development of partner organisations in the Pacific such as individual and strategic relationship building within assignments and local contexts are critical to ensuring local ownership and achieving positive and sustainable development results.

##### **Analysis**

Tracking progress towards development goals is essential for aid agencies and developing countries alike. The majority of Pacific

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<sup>28</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'How would partner organisations have developed over time if they had not received support under the Activity?'



countries have integrated MDG related targets and indicators into their national development plans. However, progress toward these targets remains slow and further investment is required.

In terms of Activity-specific support, partner organisations' monitoring and reporting on medium- and long-term outcomes remains a challenge (e.g. issues with capacity shortages, cultural factors, language barriers). Reliance on retrospective or anecdotal accounts hinders a clear and impartial understanding of how partner organisations may or may not have progressed without support from volunteers and engagement with VSA. Despite these challenges, perspectives from partner organisations make it clear that volunteer support has enabled them to develop organisational and operational systems and processes in a way that would have not been as efficiently or effectively achieved had they not received Activity assistance.

**Future considerations**

In keeping with VSA's core objective of providing technical assistance and developing capacity in the wider Pacific region, it is critical to maintain a focus on local ownership and strategic management to ensure volunteer assignments target organisational development. Further support for a range of partnerships is encouraged (i.e. private partnership agreements). Concentrated efforts and a strong focus on the measurement and assessment of how assignment outcomes are sustained will go some way in determining how beneficiaries experience Activity results.

## 4.3 Activity results<sup>29</sup>

### 4.3.1 Volunteers' contributions to development outcomes<sup>30</sup>

**Evidence**

VSA volunteers are highly skilled individuals who use their own personal approaches to support assignment success. Volunteers interviewed described a range of unique approaches taken to contribute to development outcomes for their partner organisations and local communities.

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<sup>29</sup> KEQ3: 'Which aspects of the Activity, both intended and unintended, are generating the most valuable (social, economic, cultural, environmental) results for beneficiaries, and which aspects might be improved and how?'

<sup>30</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What if any unique value do New Zealand VSA volunteers bring to development activities and results in the Pacific?'





Partner organisations interviewed reflected this perspective, with the vast majority viewing kiwi volunteers positively. Volunteers were seen as mature with specialist technical

**VSA volunteers are highly skilled and develop local solutions with communities to bring unique value to development activities.**

skills and genuine goodwill and willingness to engaging with local communities. Many partner organisations noted that they valued the distinctive, innovative approach of VSA volunteers and their willingness to build relationships and develop effective solutions for local problems.

Similarly, many volunteers described their technical skill-sets (i.e. lawyer, clinical counsellor, database adviser), and willingness to work along-side partner organisations and live within the communities. Furthermore, they often reported viewing themselves as a low cost resource in contrast to other agencies' similarly skilled technical advisors. Many volunteers reflected that VSA volunteers develop local capabilities to do what is required and appropriate in the local context with a focus on developing relationships. They viewed this approach as unique when compared to some other agencies, which were seen as service providers rather than capability developers.

The value of the technical expertise and community engagement VSA volunteers bring to their assignments is also highlighted across various VSA reports, reviews and other documentation. VSA's 2013-14 Annual Report cites several examples of partner organisation representatives being impressed with both the volunteers' technical skills and their ability to fit into the organisational culture, the nature of the work, and the culture of the region. In addition, VSA's Beyond Assignments Report suggests that 81 out of 129 interviewed volunteers spent their 'free time' (e.g. time spent outside of fulltime work hours) engaged in activities with 'impact value' or that contributed to the needs of partner organisations or the local community. These included teaching English, attending church (regardless of religious denomination), organising or attending information communications technology activities, and participating in sports with local communities.

In general, stakeholders regularly attributed the positive results and outcomes of VSA volunteers to their technical abilities and a working style that prioritises building relationships and developing local solutions (c.f. Section 4.3.3). Because of this, the Activity maintains and further develops New Zealand's positive reputation in the Pacific.

### **Analysis**

VSA acknowledges recruitment difficulties in placing long-term senior technical roles, particularly in higher-risk and more remote areas such as Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. These assignments not only



require technical expertise, but a specific set of personal attributes including adaptability, resilience, and the ability to be innovative when working with local communities. Despite these challenges, VSA is seen to be achieving successful partnerships through their 'right place, right people, right time' approach, allowing highly skilled individuals to provide their unique and personalised approaches to successful relationship development both within their partner organisations and communities.

**Future considerations**

It will be important to ensure volunteer recruitment processes continue to support identification and selection of skilled volunteers whose qualities and enthusiasm bring value to development activities in the Pacific.

**4.3.2 Enablers and barriers to Activity achievements<sup>31</sup>**

**Evidence**

The evidence was consistent: good results are achieved where there is trust between the staff and volunteer; mutual respect for the volunteer's expertise and local knowledge; and when solutions are developed incorporating technical knowledge with an understanding of what works in the given context.

**Trust, respect and relevant knowledge are foundations to assignment success, supporting contextually appropriate solutions, learning and buy-in.**

Interviews with several partner organisations provided evidence regarding enablers of success. These included volunteer flexibility towards the assignment, the ability of volunteers to build relationships and trust with the partner organisation, and to understand and be adaptive to 'Pacific ways'. In addition to personal characteristics, volunteer expertise was seen as a significant enabler to assignment success (see also Section 4.3.1). Expertise ranged from assignment specific to more general knowledge broadly applicable across a range of contexts and settings such as computer and internet literacy.

Volunteers corroborated the views of partner organisations. Building relationships was consistently noted as key to the success of the assignments, essential to building trust and understanding, and ultimately as an effective way to support the achievements of partner organisations. Building relationships with the community was also

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<sup>31</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What factors have enabled and/or limited the achievement of the intended Activity results?'



important; volunteers suggested that networking opened up opportunities that would not have otherwise existed. Adaptability was also viewed as important by volunteers, as circumstances and contexts can change quickly. Conversely, the need for flexibility was a concern for some volunteers (as noted in Section 4.2.5), particularly in circumstances when tasks moved away from assignment objectives.

Evidence from VSA documentation indicates identifying local need and supporting contextually appropriate solutions are enablers of assignment success. According to VSA's 2011-15 Strategic Intent, for example, the Activity responds to locally identified needs in addition to being delivered within the context of local and national development plans. Further, VSA has a MoU with each partner government in the countries where volunteers are placed. The MoU underpins all in-country activity and ensures VSA assignments are undertaken as part of a legitimate operation with logistical support in place, and aligns with the development priorities of the partner countries. MFAT posts support the process for development and agreement of MoUs. Some barriers to assignment success were described by partner organisations and volunteers. These included sometimes volatile political contexts (e.g. changes in government or legislation prior to or during volunteer assignments), lack of counterparts or partner organisation preparedness, and mismatched expectations between volunteers and partners, partner organisation governance and leadership challenges. Some volunteers also cited insufficient support or resources e.g. specific software, money for volunteer travel to sites as a barrier to success. However, volunteers can apply to VSA for additional funds to support assignment related activities, and programme managers ensure, as part of the assignment selection criteria, that the volunteers will be adequately supported by VSA, the partner organisation and/or the community.

***Analysis***

Challenging, changing contexts and inadequate resources are expected to remain as barriers to development across the wider Pacific Region. Frequent changes of government, challenges associated with effective governance, shifting political alliances and vulnerable public institutions all contribute to political instability and volatility in the region.

***Future considerations***

In more challenging settings, the need to develop strong relationships may be a barrier to the success of short-term assignments. There is also likely to be challenges for assignment success when working on tasks in certain sectors (e.g. public sector and institutional strengthening). It may be beneficial for VSA to undertake further analysis and trial different types of engagement with partner organisations to test success. For example, targeting short-term assignments toward discreet activity based outcomes paired with longer assignments providing ongoing capacity development and mentoring. Further, relevant knowledge and contextually appropriate approaches to development activities could be



further strengthened through continued focus on support mechanisms for volunteers both pre- and during volunteer assignments (e.g. returned volunteer forums, support networks).

### 4.3.3 Activity results<sup>32</sup>

#### **Evidence**

Findings suggest a wide variety of positive intended and unintended outcomes supporting Activity results.

The GFA describes the Activity's intended results as those that contribute to sustainable development and improvement of the quality of life in developing countries. According to various VSA documents (e.g. annual reports), post-refocus efforts contributing to these objectives include intensification of strategic partnership efforts in the wider Pacific. In addition,

development of a series of new processes and guidelines are believed to have contributed to an increase in the

**A range of positive intended and unintended outcomes support Activity results, particularly the unique value, engagement and networking opportunities Kiwi volunteers add.**

number and diversity of volunteer assignments. Capacity building initiatives have increased across specific development sectors (i.e. infrastructure development) and assignments are targeting the priorities of economic, civil society and public sector development. Interviews with stakeholders consistently supported the view that VSA has met these intended outcomes (see also Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.3).

The high quality of engagement and networking VSA volunteers provided to development activities were seen as positive unintended (unanticipated) results of the Activity (see Section 4.3.1). Anecdotal evidence from VSA's 2013-14 Annual Report suggests that VSA volunteers act as good role models and provide mentoring support towards changing individual performance and attitudes. This perspective was also reflected by the majority of partner organisations, who attributed positive results in their organisations and communities to the adaptability of the volunteers and their effective engagement approaches with organisations and their respective communities. Stakeholders often mentioned valuing volunteers' cultural awareness and diplomacy, interpersonal style, inclusiveness, ability to innovate and build networks, and respect in supporting development efforts.

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<sup>32</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What are the most valuable (intended and unintended) social, economic, cultural, and environmental results of the Activity (including beneficiaries), and why are these important?'



These findings are also corroborated by VSA's Beyond Assignments Report, which suggests that:

*"while some volunteers built on assignment-related skills, many contributed 'beyond assignment' activities in diverse ways that assignments would not predict. Several ... activities were initiated by the volunteer, but most supported existing local initiatives. This demonstrates volunteers' unique ability to recognise and serve the strengths, needs, and interests of their host communities."*

Various VSA documents suggest that one of the organisation's comparative advantages lies with New Zealand's positive reputation in the Pacific. This positive reputation was seen to be partly attributable to the genuine, long-term and respectful relationships established between professional volunteers and partner organisations.

Specific intended and unintended results of volunteers' unique engagement approach were seen to span across social, economic, cultural and environmental Activity objectives. As outlined in VSA documentation volunteers are successful in achieving individual assignment objectives such as training and capacity building (e.g. SED activities). Examples of volunteer contributions beyond assignment objectives cited by stakeholders included assisting counterparts to acknowledge and revive their local culture through tourism activities; and offering support during critical recovery periods after natural disasters.

### **Analysis**

VSA volunteers' effective approaches to capacity building at the individual, organisational and community levels are directly beneficial to New Zealand development efforts. However, without local ownership and strategic management, technical co-operation from donors risks being too fragmented to create sustainable outcomes and increased capacities in developing countries. In fact, lack of local ownership may even prevent achievement of development outcomes.

### **Future considerations**

For continued Activity success, it is suggested VSA further focuses its efforts on its more strategic relationships at organisational and individual volunteer levels. Gathering non-anecdotal evidence for intended and unintended results of the Activity also remains a challenge but could be improved via strengthened monitoring processes. These should be aligned with GFA objectives, MFAT monitoring processes such as the Activity Monitoring Assessment, and results management and measurement operations will help better ascertain medium- and long-term Activity outcomes. Last, strategic approaches to improving development outcomes can be strengthened by increased in-country relationship building efforts focused on long-term partner collaboration for assignment planning.



#### 4.3.4 Volunteer month targets<sup>33</sup>

##### **Evidence**

Findings suggest that the current Activity's focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months may not be appropriate. Further, it appears that basing VSA's costed work plan on an annual average of volunteer months has negative effects on its financial planning.

The current 2012-15 GFA includes cumulative (i.e. three-year) targets for:

- overall number of VSA assignments (N = 507)
- overall percentage of standard assignments (65 percent) and short-term assignments (35 percent); and
- overall number of volunteer months (N = 3,861).

The costed outputs table (pg. 7) in the GFA lists the target of 3,861 volunteer months as one of the three outputs for the funding period listed against total and annual indicative output costs. However, the GFA does not clearly stipulate that VSA consider volunteer month outputs annually against annual costs (i.e. a yearly, averaged target of 1,287). This lack of clarity appears to negatively affect VSA's financial planning for the following reasons.

According to stakeholders, VSA first develops its annual costed work plan around number of assignments per country, and then calculates the number of planned and actual volunteer months as an output measure for the funder. Based on this current method of averaging

**The value of the current Activity's focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months is not appropriate and appears to negatively affect VSA's financial planning.**

volunteer months annually across the funding period, financial indicators (e.g. VSA 2013-14 Annual Report) show that VSA's annual target of volunteer months in the field has not been met. For example, the total number of VSA assignments in 2013-14 covered 1,077.5 months, reaching 83.7 percent of the 1,287 month target. This percentage was an increase from 71.2 percent in 2012-13 (916.5 months) and 68.3 percent in 2011-12 (879 months).

As indicated above, VSA stakeholders attributed unmet volunteer months targets to a number of reasons (e.g. recruitment and deployment delays,

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<sup>33</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'Is the current Activity focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months appropriate, and what difference, positive and/or negative has it made?'

premature assignment termination). Because these annual assignment months' targets have not been achieved, VSA has repaid the balance of unspent funds to MFAT each year during the GFA period. However, as mentioned in Section 4.2.1, a variety of sources suggests VSA is meeting the other two targets in the costed outputs table. These targets are: managing partnerships and relationships; volunteers support capacity and trains people. In addition, based on the annual averaged costing system VSA is also meeting its target number of VSA assignments and target percentage of short-term and standard assignments.

This is the first cycle of Activity implementation since the refocus, and it appears that using annual assignment month targets may not be an appropriate indicator of Activity results for this phase. Stakeholders and relevant documents reported that VSA efforts were focused on partnership building rather than assignment placement in the early stage of the GFA. Data provided in Section 4.2.1 demonstrate lower numbers of assignments during the first few years of the new funding arrangement, with increasing rates in assignment numbers in consequent years. This occurred once partnerships had been developed and assignment scoping and volunteer placement was completed.

VSA representatives reported that in order to meet targets for volunteer months more assignments needed to be filled generally. In order to undertake more assignments, VSA puts more of their own funding (i.e. from fundraising) towards supporting additional assignments. This appears to create complications with financial reporting processes and results in VSA repaying funds to MFAT.

As outlined in the current GFA, 35 percent of assignments should be short-term placements. These assignments require proportionally more operational input than standard assignments, but increase overall assignment costs and result in fewer total volunteer months.

### **Analysis**

VSA continues to work toward meeting volunteer month targets. This includes further improvements to assessment, selection and briefing processes; more targeted recruitment campaigns; and improving turnaround of visa applications.

However, using volunteer months as an indicator of value conflicts with other Activity objectives and targets. For example, short-term assignments are valuable and attract a larger pool of volunteers than standard assignments. However, if volunteer months are used as an indicator of assignment value, then standard assignments (i.e. more months) appear more valuable than short-term assignments (i.e. less months). Further, short-term assignments require more operational and managerial effort than standard assignments, yet this additional effort is not considered separately for different assignment types using volunteer months as an indicator.



**Future considerations**

It is suggested that further investigation take place into more meaningful costed outputs and/or different models of funding allocation. This could include:

- alternative indicators or methods that allow for differences between short- and long-term assignment types (i.e. higher operational and logistical costs for short-term assignments; the impact, quality, and sustainability of different assignment types)
- greater flexibility in funding allocations (i.e. a step or progression approach) that reflects Activity implementation cycles: for example, annual plans and associated costings could allow for a greater proportion of funds to go into relationship management and planning and assignment identification, and then the proportion should change in subsequent years; and
- scope for rollover of annual under- and overspend (e.g. 10 percent leeway).

Most importantly, it is suggested that VSA and MFAT continue to agree annual outputs together and clearly state these in future GFA agreements.

**4.3.5 Activity efficiency<sup>34</sup>**

**Evidence**

Much of the information provided indicates that VSA’s governance, management and administrative systems have created greater transparency and a number of efficiencies supporting successful delivery of the Activity.

Many VSA staff acknowledged and reflected that the organisation’s historical approach to doing business was in need of revision. They considered that the development sector is becoming increasingly competitive especially with respect to funding opportunities. In response, VSA is reflecting on and reviewing its role in global development, and working beyond traditional boundaries to facilitate delivery of the

**Strengthened and more transparent VSA governance, management, programme and administrative systems have increased efficiencies in delivery of the Activity with further opportunities for improvement.**

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<sup>34</sup> Sub-evaluation question: ‘In what ways do VSA governance, management, programme and administrative systems ensure and enhance efficiency of the Activity?’





Activity. Actions include:

- ensuring VSA Council members have the right mix of skills and qualifications to identify and implement a new strategic direction;
- improvements to management and programme administrative systems and processes supporting the Activity (e.g. review of Information and Communications Technology systems in the 2011-12, development of a new recruitment database) has created more effective and sustainable data collection and reporting; and improved volunteer vetting; and
- administrative governance and programme processes (i.e. closer engagement with a wider range of stakeholders such as High Commissions, international and domestic corporate partnerships) to improve VSA's international development cooperation and assist VSA to be more responsive to MFAT needs.

However, many stakeholders emphasised the need, and identified a range of opportunities, for VSA to strengthen its processes to support delivery of the Activity. This was particularly in the areas of networking and engagement. In addition, greater in-country representation from VSA and further strengthening of strategic partnerships would further enhance programme management and programme reach.

### ***Analysis***

Strengthened and more transparent governance, management and administrative systems have increased efficiencies in delivery of the Activity since the transition to the wider Pacific. These efficiencies include the reduction of overall costs per assignment and VSA's ability to meet GFA targets. Continuous improvement of these systems and processes will assist VSA to remain responsive and implement Activity objectives. Continuous learning, reflection and review will also ensure the organisation remains an active global partner in the development space.

### ***Future considerations***

Further improvements to VSA processes and systems could include continued focus on capacity building at all three levels (individual, partner organisation and community) to support effectiveness and sustainable assignment outcomes. It is also suggested that VSA continues to explore strategic partnerships, strengthen volunteer orientation and engagement, emphasise assignment management in-country, and focus on and review the organisation's role in global development.



#### 4.3.6 Assignment experiences<sup>35</sup>

##### **Evidence**

Many VSA volunteers consider strong and positive relationships with their partner organisations and host communities as one of the most positive aspects of their assignments. Challenges related to resourcing,

**Volunteers considered strong relationships as positive, and resourcing and counterpart challenges as negative aspects of their assignment experiences.**

misaligned expectations, counterparts and capacity building were seen as contributors to some of the more negative assignment experiences.

VSA's 2011-15 Strategic Intent and the 2012-15 Triennial Plan emphasise the goal of the Activity as developing self-reliant communities using a people-centred development approach. These documents outline how VSA aims to build effective relationships, add value through partnerships, and then connect people so they can work together to increase the capability of communities to pursue their development goals. Findings from the Beyond Assignments report (2007) further reflect these objectives, noting the most prevalent effect of the Activity was community engagement and relationships built between VSA, partner organisation and local communities.

The majority of volunteers reflected on the importance of relationships. Interviews with some current and a group of alumni VSA volunteers suggested that the most positive aspects of their assignments related to network building between and across sectors and organisations. Some individuals from partner organisations also mentioned benefits of working alongside volunteers, such as increased confidence and changed work attitudes. Conversely, volunteers suggested that negative aspects of assignment experiences included not having a counterpart to train, limited resources, the political environment, and tensions balancing 'just doing the job' with capacity building.

##### **Analysis**

Effective development happens when assignments are well scoped using a participatory process with partners and an appropriately qualified volunteer is identified. Volunteers who feel engaged with their assignment and who have established genuine learning exchanges with their counterparts and communities come away with the sense that their contributions extend beyond their assignment objectives, which in turn

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<sup>35</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'What do volunteers consider to be the most and least positive aspects of their assignment experiences?'

affects them as individuals, their partner organisations and host communities. By building both formal and informal partnerships in their host communities, volunteers are able to identify and build on existing capabilities.

On the other hand, volunteers sometimes encounter challenges beyond their control. At the macro level, the political and economic fragility of development contexts can make building and sustaining successful assignments frustrating for volunteers. Micro-level challenges around supplementation (c.f. Section 4.2.5) and the lack of effective counterparts can also be an issue. The potential or actual reversal of practices they have worked hard to enact due to these aforementioned challenges is a situation volunteers must come to grips with.

**Future considerations**

VSA may consider a variety of approaches to further enhance positive aspects of volunteers' assignments and decrease the impact of less positive experiences. For example, continued emphasis on and resourcing of in-country staff will help deepen partnerships, enable volunteers to engage more fully with both partner organisations and local governments, and further support alignment of expectations and clarity of assignments for volunteers. VSA may also consider offering more learning opportunities or a learning structure for volunteers to share their successes and work collaboratively towards problem-solving specific assignment issues.

**4.3.7 Activity resourcing<sup>36</sup>**

**Evidence**

The Activity contributes to a range of development outcomes. However, it is difficult to make conclusive value for money (VFM) statements regarding the link between current resource allocation and these outcomes.<sup>37</sup>

The evaluation focused on audited VSA annual reports from 2011-12 to 2013-14 to address value for money questions. The

**Activity resources help to achieve a number of development outcomes, but there is scope to further improve how the relationship between agreed resource allocation and achievements is captured and reported.**

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<sup>36</sup> Evaluation question: 'Are resources being directed and used in the best possible way to achieve the best possible results and value?'

<sup>37</sup> VFM is defined by MFAT IDG as: "Achieving the best possible development outcomes over the life of an activity relative to the total cost of managing and resourcing that activity and ensuring that resources are used effectively, economically, and without waste."



GFA includes budget allocations for three key outputs:

- volunteer assignments (volunteer months)
- managing partnerships and relationships; and
- volunteers supporting capacity and train people.

However, VSA reporting provides no analysis linking these contracted outputs to achievements or comment on whether the balance supports the “best possible outcomes”. In fact, during stakeholder interviews some MFAT and VSA staff suggested further improvements could be made to how specific expenditures match up/realised/demonstrate Activity achievements. As previously mentioned (Section 4.3.4), these stakeholders suggested that monitoring of VFM indicators remains a challenge for a variety of reasons.

Annual reports include a summary of “core” and “in-country volunteer” costs by financial year. Additional detail for the financial year is provided in country reports including a breakdown of volunteer and partner costs. The financial narrative focuses on budgeted versus actual expenditure providing an explanation for variances. However, the reporting lacks an explanation for budgeting processes and how costs are classified in terms of Activity management versus assignment related costs. For example, there is no mention of capacity building or training expenditure, or if these are allocated to in-country assignment costs despite there being a defined budget allocation in the GFA for each year of implementation.

VSA provided some additional information including estimates for average assignment costs to assist with understanding how resource allocation relates to results. VSA staff noted factors that contribute to variations in number of volunteer months and assignment costs by country include accommodation and logistics, remoteness, and the need for security in some regions.

In 2013-14 expenditure per country, included a low of \$21,069 in Kiribati supporting three volunteer assignments (average \$7,032) and a high of \$790,621 in Vanuatu supporting 35 volunteer assignments (average \$22,589). The information provided suggests that placements in Bougainville are the most expensive at \$31,727 per volunteer, and further that the majority of volunteers are placed in countries where average assignment costs tend to be at the higher end of the scale for example Vanuatu, Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands, PNG and Bougainville. However, to gain an accurate picture of how resource allocation influences results and average assignment costs, analysis would have to be undertaken comparing assignment location, duration and results for the period of interest. Nevertheless, it is important to note that current resource allocation in terms of number of assignments per country is consistent with the literature highlighting the relative development needs across the wider Pacific region.



Evidence collected during the document review and fieldwork suggest that Activity resources are effectively allocated in terms of achieving GFA targets (i.e. assignment type, number and focus) and wider development outcomes such as:

- building counterpart capacity
- improving local work and business practices
- creating and promoting economic opportunities; and
- contributing to sustainable improvement in the quality of life in the Pacific.

Details of these outcomes have been presented in previous sections (c.f. Sections 4.1.4, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.4, 4.3.3).

Finally, VSA annual reports and interviews with a number of staff highlighted the fact that VSA has actively sought to find operational efficiencies while maintaining assignment effectiveness. For example, across the life of the GFA total number of volunteers recruited and assignments undertaken has increased each year. In addition, during the same period staff to volunteer ratios decreased from 4:6 in 2011-12 to 3:6 in 2013-14. Further, VSA staff reported a more economic use of resources achieved by restructuring in-country staffing arrangements and introducing the country programme officer role to allow in-country programme managers to take a more strategic approach to programme management.

### ***Analysis***

Volunteer programming is inherently cost effective: volunteers provide training and support skills transfer to counterparts free of charge. In contrast, various other technical assistance programmes contract highly paid technical advisors to provide short-term inputs to aid programmes.

Resources are allocated according to MFAT priority sectors within Pacific countries determined to have the greatest need. However, there is little data to suggest whether or not this is the best approach. Evaluation findings indicate there is scope to further improve monitoring and analysis to understand the relationship between agreed resource allocation and VSA achievements.

### ***Future considerations***

Value for money is broadly understood in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and economy. The VFM formulae are: effectiveness equals outcome over activity; efficiency is output over input; and economy is activity over cost. Increasingly, development programmers have advocated for an equity analysis when assessing VFM. This additional dimension is intended to reflect the perspective of the beneficiaries and



the extent to which the Activity is meeting their needs.

To understand VFM Activity monitoring and reporting should include analysis comparing resource allocation which is currently done by priority countries and sectors, with the type, number and impact of assignment-related achievements at community regional and national level. A future GFA might consider the following factors to inform future funding allocations. First, VFM could be better defined in the context of volunteer programming. This could be achieved by including specific indicators to track the dollar value of volunteer contributions. Second, Activity monitoring and reporting could be further strengthened to better capture and reflect how VSA programme expenditure (e.g. volunteer, assignment, operational, partnership and relationship) contributes to the success of the Activity. This could include close examination of how allocations are agreed and expended for different types of assignments (i.e. longer-term strategic relationships, simultaneous or consecutive postings, short or standard term assignments). A principled approach should be employed when developing VFM indicators reflecting value does not relate solely to cost and that the most costly assignments have traditionally been in the areas of greatest need.

#### **4.3.8 Assignment variety and future Activity results<sup>38</sup>**

##### **Evidence**

As illustrated in section 4.3.7, value is realised from assignments of varied length and focus, and particularly from strong relationships, clear definition of objectives, and volunteer commitment and adaptability.

At the Activity level, increased number of assignments, volunteers and training days were delivered across the life of the GFA (VSA 2013-14 Annual Report). Conversely, the number of new partners identified and relationship management meetings reduced over the life of the Activity. These changes reflect a concerted effort by VSA to establish and consolidate new networks and relationships after the 2011-12 Activity refocus. The changes also illustrate how the need for funds allocated across each component of the Activity

**Future value of Activity results will be derived from a continued mixed-assignment approach across the three development sectors within a funding framework that is flexible enough to meet changing needs and priorities.**

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<sup>38</sup> Sub-evaluation question: 'Assuming current levels of resourcing, what scale of assignments (length, number, focus) and funding are likely to provide the most valuable results in future?'

change of the lifecycle of a GFA. They also indicate that capacity to mobilise volunteers is dependent on progress in the other components of the Activity suggesting that assignment targets early in the funding cycle should be lower than in later years.

Many volunteers reported that the time to settle in and engage with the local community, understand the local context and volunteer learning are all key elements that speak to the importance of a carefully considered approach to assignment mix/length. However, feedback on short-term assignments was that they attract a different type of volunteer that can often meet very specific partner needs in a timely fashion.

None of the documentation reviewed was able to provide a clear indication of the extent to which changing the mix assignments would alter the outcomes. In addition, it has been noted that outcomes tend to be assignment specific and realise varying degrees of sustainability.

### ***Analysis***

Assuming no change in resourcing under a new GFA, future funding arrangements and reporting requirements should include a mix of assignment types reflecting the successes outlined above. In addition, it should introduce a degree of flexibility to meet changing needs and priorities for example intensive periods of relationships development followed by increased assignment numbers.

### ***Future considerations***

Articulation or definition of an agreed position on VFM in the context of a volunteer programme would increase transparency and better reflect the value realised through the Activity. The agreed approach should not only take account of effectiveness, efficiency and economy but should include an equity analysis that recognises how the intended beneficiaries understand the value and the extent to which the Activity is meeting their needs. Articulation of differences in objectives and volunteer capability for short- vs long-term assignments would further assist resourcing priorities that target assignment-specific objectives. In turn, these suggestions could be translated into the adoption of clear VFM indicators in the Activity results management framework. Other considerations include:

- continue to offer a mix of short-term and standard assignments to better meet the needs of partner organisations and attract the diverse range of volunteers and skills needed to make the Activity successful
- build flexibility into the GFA with respect to allocations across the life of a grant agreement in recognition of the fact that sectoral or country refocus to respond to emerging issues requires relationship building (c.f. previous section); and
- the GFA should reflect the extent to which capacity building and organisational strengthening are objectives of the Activity.



Consider allocating funding to support a more strategic approach to these, or alternatively, VSA might quarantine their own contributions for this purpose and ensure MFAT funds are allocated to additional volunteer assignments.









## 5 DAC criteria assessment

The following section assesses Activity achievements since its reorientation in 2011-12 to the wider Pacific against DAC criteria. Evaluative merit ratings are provided for each of the DAC criteria and presented below. As the merit rating key indicates, DAC criteria ratings are based on the evaluative evidence collected (presented in parentheses by section number) and have been colour-coded according to level of observed performance of the Activity.

**Table 4. Merit rating key.**

Merit indicator	Descriptor
	<b>Exemplary performance with few improvements required</b>
	<b>Good performance with minor improvements required</b>
	<b>Satisfactory performance with some improvements required</b>
	<b>Under-performance with major improvements required</b>

### *Relevance*<sup>39</sup>



**The Activity is relevant; it aligns and is consistent with beneficiary priorities**



The Activity is relevant to current and future development priorities in the Pacific (4.1.5). The overarching goals and objectives of the Activity reflect MFAT's development priorities (4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3). VSA's policies management and operational procedures contribute to ongoing relevance of the Activity (4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3). Volunteer assignments are addressing locally identified needs (4.1.5).

### *Effectiveness*<sup>40</sup>



**The Activity is mostly effective; many of the intended results have been achieved**

VSA has delivered on agreed Activity outputs (4.2.1), generating a range of positive outcomes, intended and unintended (4.2.2, 4.3.3). Volunteer achievements are varied

<sup>39</sup> The extent to which the Activity aligns and remains consistent with beneficiary priorities, country priorities, and partner and MFAT policies.

<sup>40</sup> The extent to which the activity's intended results are achieved.



and assignment specific but consistently develop individual and organisation capabilities and, in some cases, community or industry capacity (4.2.2, 4.3.8).

Trust and respect is fostered through effective networking and genuine engagement between VSA staff, partner organisations and volunteers contributing to assignment success (4.3.2). VSA recruits skilled and experienced volunteers for relevant assignments through robust recruitment processes that are cost effective (4.1.7), and volunteers transfer relevant knowledge and support development of contextually appropriate solutions, promote learning and achieve buy-in from partner organisations (4.3.3, 4.3.6). VSA processes are effective at ensuring assignments are jointly scoped with partner organisations (4.1.6).

There is potential to increase the effectiveness of the Activity. The effectiveness and appropriateness of the current Activity's focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months is unclear and appears to negatively affect VSA's financial planning (4.3.4), and reporting processes are not currently presented in a manner that supports definitive statements on whether or not resources are being allocated in the best possible way (4.3.7). Further, there is scope to better address cross-cutting issues. VSA policies and procedures such as volunteer briefing and orientation identify and emphasise the importance of these, but this does not translate to action across all assignments (4.1.4).

### **Efficiency<sup>41</sup>**



**The Activity is somewhat efficient; resources are allocated in a cost effective if not always efficient manner**

VSA governance, management, programme and administrative systems support the efficient use of available resources (4.3.5), and volunteer assignments address the specific requirements of partner organisations and consequently regional needs, by building local capacity (4.3.8).

However, further efficiency can be achieved by reducing the time it takes to scope assignments, recruit and mobilise volunteers (4.1.6). In addition, the current focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months (see also effectiveness) negatively affects the efficiency of VSA's financial planning and

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<sup>41</sup> How efficiently resources (e.g. funds, expertise, time) are converted to results.



reporting process, and does not provide any clear benefit in terms of monitoring and assessing Activity outcomes (4.3.4).

## ***Sustainability***<sup>42</sup>



### **The Activity is somewhat sustainable with scope for improvement**

Partner organisations considered VSA and volunteer support under the Activity as a pivotal and positive contributor to their successful development and organisational longevity (4.2.6), and some Activity benefits were seen to persist beyond assignment completion, including longer-term benefits in a few instances (4.2.4). It is important to sustainability of the programme that there is local awareness and appreciation of these benefits to promote future success (4.2.4).

However, partner organisations' potential dependence on VSA volunteers to supplement their permanent workforce is an ongoing risk (4.2.5). In addition, sustainability is sometimes hindered by volunteers 'owning' assignments more than partner organisations (3.2.3).

## ***Impact***<sup>43</sup>



### **The overall long-term effects of the Activity are positive and include a range of intended and unintended results**

Good development occurs where assignments are well scoped, counterparts are clearly identified and engaged, and relationships are strong (4.3.6). Findings suggest that volunteer assignments have positive long-term effects and contribute to partner organisation development (4.2.4). However, monitoring of the extent to which achievements are sustained beyond assignment completion could be improved (4.3.6). Further, as the evaluation occurred during the first three-year phase of reorientation within the Pacific, it is anticipated that additional long-term effects will be identified in the next implementation phase.

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<sup>42</sup> The likelihood of continued long-term benefits after major assistance (e.g. donor funding) has been completed.

<sup>43</sup> The long-term effect(s) resulting from an activity including positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect effects. Impact also refers to the goal of the Activity in the Results Framework.



# 6 Conclusions

Similar to the structure of findings presented in Section 4, the following conclusions regarding the Activity are focused around the overarching KEQs concerning 1) Activity design and management; 2) Activity implementation and sustainability; and 3) Activity results.

## 6.1 Activity design and management<sup>44</sup>

Overall, VSA policies and administration processes contribute to sustainable development and improved quality of life in the Pacific. The GFA provides a framework for these processes by focusing on outputs and outcomes achieved through a mix of standard and short-term assignments in sectors aligned with MFAT's development priorities.

VSA works with beneficiary countries to identify current development needs in each of the MFAT priority sectors and with partner organisations to identify and scope assignments. An emphasis on building strong relationships and a collaborative approach to implementation ensure good local engagement and assignments designed to meet local needs. There is scope to further develop administrative procedures to better support assignments/volunteers in addressing cross-cutting issues within each placement.

Current administrative and recruitment processes secure a range of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers in a cost effective, if not always efficient, manner. The time between assignment identification, scoping and development through to volunteer recruitment and mobilisation can be lengthy. MFAT, VSA, partner organisations and volunteers all expressed interest in improving efficiency in the area of volunteer recruitment and mobilisation without compromising on the quality of relationships, assignments, outcomes, and volunteer and partner organisations' experiences.

## 6.2 Activity implementation and sustainability<sup>45</sup>

VSA has broadly delivered on the agreed outputs of the Activity. Since the Activity refocus to the wider Pacific in 2011-12, VSA has strengthened existing and established many new relationships.

Volunteer assignments are seen by many partner organisations as a pivotal for their organisations' development. Volunteer achievements are varied, assignment specific, and consistently contribute to individual and organisational development. In some cases assignments also contribute to development and strengthening of communities and industry. Some assignment benefits persist beyond assignment completion, but there is an ongoing

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<sup>44</sup> KEQ1: 'How well designed and implemented in the VSA Activity to achieve its intended results, now and into the future?'

<sup>45</sup> KEQ2: 'To what extent is the VSA Activity making a sustainable difference for the intended beneficiaries including partner organisations, partner countries and citizens and the New Zealand Aid Programme?'



risk that partner organisations will become dependent on VSA volunteers or supplement workforce capacity through assignments.

### **6.3 Activity results<sup>46</sup>**

VSA volunteers are committed, enthusiastic and motivated, bringing a can-do attitude to development activities. They are highly skilled and develop strong positive relationships; they are able to engage effectively with people to develop contextually appropriate solutions to local issues. Characteristics such as these assist volunteers to realise a range of unintended and intended benefits for the communities to which they are assigned.

VSA's focus on increasing transparency in and strengthening governance, management and administrative systems has yielded efficiencies in Activity delivery. However, there are further opportunities for improvements to systems and processes. These include better use of VSA staff in-country, capitalising on opportunities to extend VSA networks, and engaging further with MFAT personnel. In addition, there may be times when greater flexibility with funding allocations could better meet the needs of intended beneficiaries (e.g. when establishment of a new sectoral focus or a new country programme requires greater investment in relationship management than assignment numbers).

Resources for Activity implementation are appropriately allocated for volunteer assignments, managing partnerships and relationships, and training and capacity building as prescribed by the GFA. It is clear that the Activity delivers value for money; achieving a range of positive outcomes with varying degrees of sustainability. However, it is difficult to make definitive statements on the relative contributions these allocations make to the achievement of Activity outcomes. Nevertheless, it is evident that resource allocations, partnership and relationship management, and the delivery of value for money are all contributors to the Activity's success and wider development objectives.

### **6.4 Future focus<sup>47,48</sup>**

Across the Pacific, achievement of MDG targets has been tracking slowly and a broad range of development needs remain. Vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change are likely to become more urgent priorities, while many existing challenges such as those concerning human rights, gender equity and environmental sustainability will persist. Countries across the wider Pacific region also have significant development needs within New Zealand Aid Programme priority sectors (i.e. economic development, and institutional, government and civil society strengthening). These needs are often exacerbated by socio-political barriers such as frequent changes of government, challenges associated with effective governance and vulnerable public institutions; these factors all contribute to political instability and volatility in the region.

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<sup>46</sup> KEQ3: 'Which aspects of the Activity, both intended and unintended, are generating the most valuable results for beneficiaries and which aspects might be improved and how?'

<sup>47</sup> 'What lessons can be drawn to inform the future design of the VSA Pacific programme?'

<sup>48</sup> 'What are the key future challenges and issues that will need to be addressed? How should these be addressed?'



Volunteer programmes in the Pacific such as VSA provide an opportunity to meet development needs. Looking forward, and in keeping with VSA's core objective of providing technical assistance and developing locally relevant and locally delivered capacity in the wider Pacific region, it will be important for VSA to:

- maintain a focus on strategic management and local ownership to ensure volunteer assignments target relevant development objectives
- develop more strategic partnerships to encourage increased ownership of the assignment development process and sustained outcomes
- consider new ways of engaging with local communities to further enable capacity building and thereby sustain development efforts
- consider how contractual levers and operational processes can be further developed to deliver more sustainable results
- agree more meaningful costed outputs and/or different models of funding allocation with MFAT; and
- offer more learning opportunities or learning structures for volunteers to share their successes and to work collaboratively towards problem-solving specific assignment issues.

Continuous improvement of VSA systems and processes will assist VSA to remain responsive to and implement Activity objectives. Continuous learning, reflection and review will also ensure the organisation remains an effective global development partner. The presence of other volunteer agencies in the Pacific working on many of the same development issues suggests there is opportunity to strengthen collaboration, build upon networks and use local intelligence to improve outcomes.



# 7 Lessons Learned

The current GFA commenced following a year of transition (2011-12), when MFAT requested VSA refocus its programme on the wider Pacific region. The following section presents lessons learned to inform continued improvement in delivery of VSA services. Activity specific lessons and those widely applicable to development programming are outlined.

## 7.1 Activity specific lessons

1. Transparent and robust governance arrangements, a commitment to professionalising and improving systems and processes, and undertaking strategic programming enables VSA to be agile and responsive to MFAT needs.
2. Provision of a range of assignment types supports diversity and breadth in the volunteer pool, enabling VSA to meet a range of partner needs.
3. It is critical for VSA to agree clear and achievable development outcomes for each assignment, and to support the volunteer and partner organisation to focus on achieving these outcomes.
4. Assignments succeed where there are robust support structures in place that simultaneously allow for sufficient flexibility for each individual volunteer.
5. Strong relationships are a common characteristic of successful assignments and volunteers who actively engage with other volunteers, High Commission staff, the local community and culture tend to have more positive assignment experiences and better overall outcomes.

## 7.2 Broader development programming lessons

1. Monitoring and evaluation systems need to reflect development priorities, incorporate key definitions and concepts, and clearly describe success to ensure indicators are relevant and inform development priorities.
2. Cross-cutting issues are most consistently addressed where the issue is central to the project, activity, assignment or organisational function (e.g. gender equity).
3. Identifying key counterparts (individuals, teams or whole organisations) and setting clear expectations is essential to support capacity building.



## 8 Recommendations

Based on evaluation findings, the following recommendations aim to inform future decisions for MFAT and VSA regarding design and delivery of the Activity beyond the current funding period. Recommendations—structured around the evaluation ToR objective concerning decision-making—outline a range of options to further enhance the effectiveness and value of the Activity.

### 8.1 Future design<sup>49</sup>

MFAT and VSA should use a collaborative approach for future Activity design by:

- articulating key terminology (cross-cutting, capacity building, partnerships)
- continuing flexibility to ensure responsiveness to emerging needs and priorities
- incorporating agreed strategies into respective work programmes to achieve priority outcomes
- sharing ‘pains and gains’ to increase transparency.

### 8.2 Good development practice<sup>50</sup>

VSA should build on current good partnership practices by:

- strengthening development and implementation of partnership strategies to reflect a range of partnership types (long-term strategies or one-off engagements), priority sectors, countries, and number and type of volunteer assignments (clustered and sequenced, staged)
- capitalising on existing in-country resources (i.e. VSA, partnerships and networks) to further support and engage partner organisations and volunteers.

### 8.3 Value for Money<sup>51</sup>

MFAT and VSA should agree, define and describe key value for money indicators and means of verification.

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<sup>49</sup> ‘What lessons can be drawn to inform the future design of the VSA Pacific Programme?’

<sup>50</sup> ‘What can be learnt from good development practice in volunteer assignments that would add value?’

<sup>51</sup> ‘Assuming current resourcing levels within VSA, what scale of assignments (length, number) and programme funding is likely to provide the best return on investment?’





## 8.4 Changes to the Activity<sup>52</sup>

MFAT and VSA should strengthen Activity monitoring and reporting to improve sustainability and impact and capture key outcomes. This includes clearly defining key development objectives, and agreeing on performance indicators and targets for:

- capacity building
- cross-cutting issues
- value for money.

In light of DAC criteria (c.f. Section 5), VSA should continue to review and strengthen operational policies and procedures. This will assist with identification of opportunities for increased efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the Activity in areas such as:

- recruitment processes
- mix and type of volunteer assignments
- new approaches to standard and short-term assignments
- training and mentoring programmes for locally engaged volunteers.

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<sup>52</sup> 'What changes are needed to ensure VSA are even more effective and efficient, remain relevant and contribute to sustained development outcomes?'



# Appendices

## Appendix One: KEQS and Evaluation Sub-Questions

### **KEQ 1: How well designed and implemented is the VSA Activity to achieve its intended results now and into the future?**

- 1.1 Is the Activity in its focus and operations relevant to current and future aspirations (of MFAT as funders and VSA partner organisations/countries as the primary intended beneficiaries) for Pacific development?
- 1.2 Is the Activity aligned with wider MFAT policy and development objectives?
- 1.3 In what ways do VSA and MFAT Activity management, governance and operations support relevance and coherence of the Activity with wider development policies?
- 1.4 In what ways do VSA and MFAT Activity management, governance and operations support relevance and coherence of the Activity with wider development policies?
- 1.5 Is the Activity aligned with wider MFAT policy and development objectives?
- 1.6 To what degree and how effectively are volunteer assignments addressing issues of human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment, and the environment?
- 1.7 Is the Activity in its focus and operations relevant to current and future aspirations (of MFAT as funders and VSA partner organisations/countries as the primary intended beneficiaries) for Pacific development?
- 1.8 How effective are processes for ensuring assignments are jointly scoped by VSA with the partner organisations?
- 1.9 How does VSA ensure skilled and experienced volunteers are recruited for relevant assignments?

### **KEQ 2: To what extent is the VSA Activity making a sustainable difference for the intended beneficiaries including partner organisations, partner countries and citizens and the NZ Aid Programme?**

- 2.1 How well have VSA delivered on their intended outputs and short-term outcomes?
- 2.2 How well have VSA delivered on their intended outputs and short-term outcomes?
- 2.3 What are the most significant changes/outcomes being achieved or are likely to be achieved over the longer term through the Activity for beneficiaries?
- 2.4 What is the extent of partner organisation (especially in-country) ownership of assignments and achievement of the assignment objectives throughout volunteer



assignments and beyond?

- 2.5 Do benefits of assignments persist after assignments end, and what factors assist or hinder these benefits?
- 2.6 What processes are in place to manage the risk of dependence on VSA volunteers or use of volunteers as supplementation?
- 2.7 How would partner organisations have developed over time if they had not received support under the Activity?

**KEQ 3: Which aspects of the Activity, both intended and unintended, are generating the most valuable (social, economic, cultural, environmental) results for beneficiaries, and which aspects might be improved and how?**

- 3.1 What if any unique value do New Zealand VSA volunteers bring to development activities and results in the Pacific?
- 3.2 What factors have enabled and/or limited the achievement of the intended Activity results?
- 3.3 What are the most valuable (intended and unintended) social, economic, cultural, and environmental results of the Activity (including beneficiaries), and why are these important?
- 3.4 Is the current Activity focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months appropriate, and what difference, positive and/or negative has it made?
- 3.5 In what ways do VSA governance, management, programme and administrative systems ensure and enhance efficiency of the Activity?
- 3.6 What do volunteers consider to be the most and least positive aspects of their assignment experiences?
- 3.7 Are resources being directed and used in the best possible way to achieve the best possible results and value?
- 3.8 Assuming current levels of resourcing, what scale of assignments (length, number, focus) and funding are likely to provide the most valuable results in future?



## Appendix Two: Country and Sector Focus by Volunteer Agency

	COUNTRY								
	Bougainville	Fiji	Kiribati	PNG	Samoa	SI	Timor-Leste	Tonga	Vanuatu
AVID	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PEACE CORPS		●			●			●	●
UNV		●	●	●	●		●		
<b>VSA*</b>	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
VSO	●			●			●		

	SECTOR							
	CC/DRR/E**	Education	Gender	Governance	Health	Livelihoods	Youth	Other
AVID	●	●			●	●		●
PEACE CORPS	●	●			●		●	
UNV	●	●		●	●		●	●
<b>VSA</b>	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
VSO		●	●	●	●			

\*VSA also has current volunteer assignments in Cook Islands and Tokelau.

\*\*CC = Climate change; DRR = Disaster risk deduction; E = Environment.



### Appendix Three: Results Table

A coding system was developed to manage all interview and document data. A total of 106 sources of evidence were collected (MFAT and VSA documentation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and feedback sessions). Outcome statements based on this evidence answer each of the KEQs in the first column of the table below. A summary of supporting and divergent evidence for each evaluation question is presented in the second and third columns of the table below. The final column includes suggested next steps that also informed the development of the recommendations in Section 8 of this report.

Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
4.1 Activity design			
3.1.1 The current GFA supports VSA alignment to MFAT’s development priorities	1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 82-85, 88, 95, 103	--	retain key elements of Activity  consider ways in which the GFA contract can further support measurement and success of medium- and long-term outcomes identified as pertinent to achieve prioritised development goals
4.1.2 VSA policies and administrative procedures around assignment identification support goal achievement	1, 15, 20, 22, 37, 42, 59, 60, 71, 88, 95, 97-102	--	continue to support the goals of development success through policies and procedures  continue to align assignment selection with achieving results and addressing priorities
4.1.3 VSA processes support good alignment with wider MFAT policy and development objectives/priorities, and support collective efforts towards a common aim	1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 18, 94, 95, 97-102, 103	3, 7, 13	identify where collective efforts can be further leveraged, while considering resourcing implications  share and celebrate the achievement of joint goals

Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
4.1.4 Cross-cutting issues are addressed in some roles, and policies and administrative processes can be developed to further support this priority across all assignments	10, 11, 15, 18, 19, 39, 49, 51, 73, 75, 77, 81, 84, 85, 98	1, 10, 11, 12, 15, 19, 20, 45, 52, 55, 56, 72, 73, 88, 97, 99-102	<p>continue to clarify and improve operational processes and priorities to focus assignments on achieving success across cross-cutting issues</p> <p>coordinate multiple efforts and continue to drive focus on desired changes related to cross-cutting priorities</p>
4.1.5 The Activity focus is relevant to current regional needs, and volunteer assignments address these needs on an individual level	7, 12, 18, 26, 35, 41, 47, 55, 57, 59, 61-67, 70-74, 76, 80, 95, 97-102	15, 18, 21	<p>maintain support for future needs in the Pacific by continuing to adapt to each regions' specific and changing contexts</p> <p>current policies and administrative procedures should further foster regionally-driven development with consideration of the future needs in mind</p> <p>continue to adopt a GFA focus on and encourage flexibility and responsiveness to regional development needs</p>
4.1.6 VSA operational processes around assignment scoping and recruitment are mostly effective though not always efficient	1, 8, 11, 13, 31, 46, 61-81	11, 15, 18, 21, 27, 30, 41, 42, 60, 65, 71, 77	<p>further improve operational procedures to be more efficient and responsive to current need while retaining relevant and successful placements</p> <p>enhance strategic partnerships with partner organisations to encourage ownership and development of assignment descriptions and to decrease assignment development time</p>
4.1.7 VSA recruitment processes secure the right	1, 22, 26, 29, 37, 42, 59, 60, 71, 73, 79, 80	11, 22, 38, 42, 60, 67	further improve recruitment procedures to further enable the local needs to be met in a time-efficient way while

Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
volunteers in a cost effective way			maintaining priorities around identifying the “right” volunteer
<b>4.2. Activity implementation and sustainability</b>			
4.2.1 VSA delivered on many intended Activity outputs	10, 18, 24, 45-47, 49, 65, 71-73, 77, 83-85	3, 7, 24, 33, 47, 54	<p>sustain efforts in sourcing assignments contributing to desired long-term success</p> <p>further monitor Activity outputs such as capacity building efforts as consistently and widely as possible</p>
4.2.2 VSA volunteer achievements are varied, assignment specific, and consistently contribute at the individual and organisation capability levels and in some cases at the community or industry levels	32, 33, 37, 39, 40, 43-47, 49, 54, 56, 57, 62, 65, 66, 69, 71, 73, 77, 80, 85	11, 37, 40, 47, 61	<p>create further opportunities for VSA staff and volunteers to learn from assignment achievements</p> <p>consider ways in which successes can be replicated</p>
4.2.3 Volunteers ‘owned’ assignments more than partner organisations	26, 37, 43, 47, 53, 55, 57, 58, 71, 80, 81	65, 77, 81	<p>assignments should focus on overarching development goals supported via operational practices</p> <p>increase partner organisations monitoring and reporting of successes according to development objectives</p>
4.2.4 Some assignment benefits persist after assignments end, and building local knowledge and	18, 23, 26, 30, 40, 43, 47, 50, 53, 56, 59, 61, 52, 67, 71, 72, 74, 76, 80, 98, 101	40, 50, 57, 60, 65, 74, 78, 80, 99, 100	continue to consider locally-available capabilities when determining what assignment services or knowledge to provide

Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
appreciation of assignment benefits support this success			<p>consider enhancing collaborative discussion and agreement on perceived assignment benefits to foster shared understanding and collective buy-in</p> <p>enhance collaborative contractual and relationship engagement between programme managers, volunteers, partner organisations and counterparts to agree benefits of assignment contributions</p> <p>increase emphasis on measurement of how assignment benefits continue after an assignment ends to encourage continued capacity building</p>
4.2.5 Partner organisations' dependence on VSA volunteers as supplementation remains a risk, and there is scope for improvements to better manage this risk	40, 52, 55, 57, 58, 60, 65, 71, 72, 78, 80	23	continue to focus on robust assignment management practices and engagement between programme managers and partner organisations in-country
4.2.6 Partner organisations considered VSA and volunteer support under the Activity as a pivotal and positive contributor to their organisations' development	54, 63, 65, 71-73, 77, 79, 80	--	<p>continue efforts focused on local ownership and strategic management to ensure volunteer inputs targeting organisational development are sustained</p> <p>foster continued support of a range of partnerships to bolster focused short-term assignment outcomes</p> <p>concentrate efforts on the measurement and assessment of</p>



Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
sustainability efforts			
4.3 Activity results			
4.3.1 VSA volunteers are highly skilled and develop local solutions with communities to bring unique value to development activities	1, 7, 10, 15, 18, 22, 43, 46, 47, 55-57, 59, 60, 61, 65-67, 69, 72, 77, 79, 80	--	ensure volunteers continue to have the capability and characteristics that support their achievements through their ways of working
4.3.2 Trust, respect and relevant knowledge are foundations to assignment success, supporting contextually appropriate solutions, learning and buy-in	7, 33, 37, 41, 47, 50, 52, 53, 57, 59, 60, 61, 76, 81, 88	--	<p>continue to ensure assignment success through consideration of changing development contexts and level of relationship need</p> <p>consider potential of accompanying short-term assignments along with other two-year assignments</p> <p>strengthen support mechanisms for volunteers both pre- and during volunteer assignments</p>
4.3.3 A range of positive intended and unintended outcomes support Activity results, particularly the unique value, engagement and networking opportunities Kiwi volunteers add	2, 15, 18, 20, 23, 26, 35, 41, 42, 46, 47- 49, 53, 60, 65, 70-73, 75, 97, 99-102	--	<p>further focus efforts on strategic relationship approaches at both the organisational and individual volunteer levels</p> <p>continue to strengthen monitoring processes and</p> <p>consider further alignment of monitoring processes with those of MFAT to better ascertain medium- and long-term Activity outcomes</p>

Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
4.3.4 The value of the current Activity's focus on achieving a stated number of volunteer months is not appropriate and appears to negatively affect VSA's financial planning	20-25, 25, 28, 82-85, 88	--	investigate alternative, more meaningful cost outputs and/or different funding allocation models  agree annual outputs collaboratively and clearly state these agreements in future GFA agreements
4.3.5 Strengthened and more transparent VSA governance, management, programme and administrative systems have increased efficiencies in delivery of the Activity with further opportunities for improvement	2, 5, 11, 18, 20, 23, 24, 29, 31, 41, 42, 44, 53, 56, 60, 70, 79, 81, 83, 93	--	continue focus on capacity building using three-level approach to support effective and sustainable assignment outcomes  continue investigation of suitable strategic stakeholders  continue to strengthen volunteer orientation and engagement  continue to improve assignment management in-country  continue focus on and review of global development role
4.3.6 Volunteers considered strong relationships as positive, and resourcing and counterpart challenges as negative aspects of their assignment experiences	37, 41, 43-45, 46, 48, 49, 55-57, 58, 86	--	continue emphasis on and resourcing of in-country staff to deepen partnerships  develop further opportunities for volunteers' shared learning to occur



Outcome statements	Supporting evidence	Divergent evidence	Suggested next steps
<p>4.3.7 Although Activity resources help to achieve a number of development outcomes, there is scope to further improve how the relationship between agreed resource allocation and these achievements is captured</p>	<p>32, 39, 40, 47, 49, 56, 57, 62, 65, 66, 69, 71-73, 77, 80</p>	<p>--</p>	<p>develop a specific VFM definition and key indicators for reporting and evaluation for future GFAs specific to volunteer programming</p> <p>further strengthen performance monitoring and reporting to better capture and reflect how different programme components contribute to Activity successes</p>
<p>4.3.8 Future value of Activity results will be derived from a continued mixed-assignment approach across the three development sectors within a funding framework that is flexible enough to meet changing needs and priorities</p>	<p>41, 43, 46, 47, 52, 53, 57, 60, 83-85</p>	<p>--</p>	<p>develop a specific VFM definition and key indicators for reporting and evaluation for future GFAs specific to volunteer programming</p> <p>further articulate differences in objectives and volunteer capability for short- versus long-term assignments to further assist resourcing priorities targeting assignment-specific objectives</p> <p>consider adopting clear VFM indicators in Activity results management framework</p>