

# Evaluation of Mobile Playgroup Project Fiji

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**Commissioned by**

**The New Zealand Agency for International Development  
Nga Hoe Tuputupu-mai-tawhiti**

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## Executive summary

### Introduction

The Mobile Playgroup Project (MPP) was introduced by Save the Children Fiji (SC Fiji) in 2002 in response to the need to improve access to and quality of early childhood education (ECE) for children in economically disadvantaged communities. The original objectives of the project were to improve access to ECE, to raise awareness of children's needs and issues and to help communities in informal and squatter settlements to develop and manage an ECE programme. Following a review in 2008, the objectives were revised to expand the project, to strengthen community commitment and capacity to manage MPP, to build the capability of community volunteers as ECE teachers and to put more focus on the management of the project by SC Fiji. The project objectives guiding MPP Phase 3 since October 2008 are these:

- Objective 1: By 2011, 27 new ECE centres established and a total of 44 centres functioning and recognized by Fiji Ministry of Education
- Objective 2: By 2011, 44 communities have the capacity to manage ECE centres through Community Education Committees (CECs) and community interest groups.
- Objective 3: By 2011, the capacity of community volunteers as ECE teachers has been developed to enable sustainability of the community centres and a quality ECE for the children.
- Objective 4: Strengthen the capacity of SC Fiji MPP staff to effectively provide management, monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Initially a mobile service in which an ECE teacher ran a playgroup from a purpose-equipped truck, in Phases 2 and 3 most communities have dedicated or shared premises from which the sessions are operated. The role of ECE teachers has become one of training and supporting volunteers selected by the community to take on the role of community teacher aides. More recently, the role of community development officer (CDO) has been created to support communities to govern and manage the centres and to seek recognition and funding from the Ministry of Education.

The military coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006 along with food and fuel price increases and a declining global economy have had significant negative impacts on Fiji. These problems have been compounded more recently by the turmoil in international money markets and the further downturn in the worldwide economic conditions. Informal settlements have poor infrastructure, housing and sanitation. Health and social problems as well as disputes with neighbours and other ethnic groups are common, as are disputes over community leadership. Significant barriers to achieving a sustainable livelihood include low levels of education and business literacy, limited budgeting experience, and limited access to funding. Women-headed households are over-represented in informal settlements and women are often required to undertake work in their communities as well as to provide an income, food, and security for their families.

### The evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a basis for NZAID, SC Fiji and SCNZ to determine outcomes and plan future directions. The evaluation will be used to inform programming discussions and for further development of accountability reporting. The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the relevance, the effectiveness and the efficiency of MPP from its inception to June 2009.

The evaluation drew on a range of data sources including project documents such as funding agreements, PIDs, letters of variation, budgets, six monthly and annual reports, evaluation reports, appraisals, letters and emails; monitoring data collected and analysed by the project; interviews with stakeholders in New Zealand and Fiji; observations of MPP programmes in operation at 16 centres in

Suva, Labasa and Lautoka; visits to schools where principals and teachers were interviewed; interviews with a range of SC Fiji staff at all levels of the organisation; interviews with community teacher aides and community education committee members; and, interviews with parents, caregivers and other members of communities with MPP centres. The preliminary findings of the evaluation were synthesised during the in-country visit and discussed with key stakeholders during a feedback workshop following which findings were confirmed.

The scope of the evaluation, determined by time and budget, meant that not every centre was visited nor was every staff member and stakeholder interviewed. However, the evaluation team is confident that a good sample was achieved. The evaluation was limited by the student achievement data available, and by the quality of some of the monitoring data especially that on enrolment and attendance. The team met challenges in engaging with the Fiji Ministry of Education (MoE) although this was usefully illustrative of the difficulties the project itself has in engaging with the MoE.

## Relevance

International research supports high quality ECE as being of great importance to children, families and communities particularly in developing countries. The first goal of *Education for All*, combined initiative of five international agencies, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank, is 'Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.' With a development model that aligns with Fiji government policies and plans, prioritises local design and development, fosters community ownership and plans for sustainability through integration into government provision the purpose and objectives of MPP reflect sound development principles and are aligned with international priorities.

All the centres visited were in economically disadvantaged communities, some of them in extremely deprived communities. Features of deprivation included high levels of unemployment, high rates of single motherhood, low levels of education and housing insecurity exacerbated by political upheaval, difficult economic conditions and severe floods in January 2007, 2008 and 2009. As a consequence informal settlements have increased in number and more children are living in areas where ECE is not available. The MPP programme has responded by increasing the number of centres being established, the rate of introduction of new centres and by introducing a focus on income generating projects to help meet centre costs.

The evaluation team did not identify any comparable ECE projects targeting impoverished communities in the Pacific. In comparison with other ECE projects in the Pacific, MPP faces additional challenges of working within communities lacking traditional structures and operating in an environment of minimal government support.

SC Fiji is planning for the next phase of MPP envisaging an initial period of consolidation followed by a further period of expansion. SC Fiji intends to submit a proposal to NZAID and other donors before the end of the current funding agreement in 2011. Although designed for sustainability through integration with Fiji's other ECE provision, the process of achieving MoE recognition upon which this depends has been slower than expected. This, alongside a clear intention to continue expanding means that MPP will be dependent on external funding for the foreseeable future. To date MPP has been heavily reliant on NZAID funding with only small contributions from other donors and the evaluation recommends that SC Fiji directs more effort to building relationships with other donors currently supporting education sector activities in Fiji.

## Effectiveness

From 2002-2008 MPP established 17 centres in Suva and Labasa. Reports show that over 1700 children were enrolled at the centres during that time. Information on achievements, although anecdotal, noted children showed marked gains in learning, co-ordination and cognitive development, that participating communities gained new skills, knowledge and livelihoods, that awareness of child rights increased and was embedded and that communities gained experience in

governing and managing centres. The evaluation team investigated whether any additional quantitative data measuring outcomes over this period existed but found nothing beyond that included in the monitoring reports submitted to NZAID. Narrative reports suggest that MPP centres provided informal settlements, which were without strong community networks, with a focus for collaboration as community members worked together to develop and manage the centres.

### **Establishment, operation and outcomes**

Objective 1 of MPP3 is that by 2011, 27 new ECE centres will be established and a total of 44 centres functioning and recognised by Fiji Ministry of Education. There has been significant progress in establishing new centres with 14 centres established in Phases 1 and 2 joined by a further nine established in Year 1 of MPP 3 and a further four in the first 6 months of Year 2 giving a total of 27 centres in February 2010.

Initially an MPP centre needs to apply for MoE establishment, the requirements for which are reasonably straightforward. Once a centre is established the next formal process is to seek MoE recognition. Having centres recognised means that playgroup is absorbed into the formal education system and qualifies for Ministry resources including salary and building grants. Moving centres to MoE recognition is an essential part of SC Fiji's sustainability strategy. The requirements for recognition predominantly focus on health and safety aspects of the building from which the playgroup is to operate. The impoverishment of informal communities makes having a dedicated building that meets requirements beyond the resources of many – the key reason behind much slower progress towards MoE recognition and sustainability than was anticipated.

While systems are in place to capture enrolment and attendance data they are not sufficiently robust or well-kept to provide reliable information. The evaluation team saw evidence of an enrolment register and daily attendance records in all the centres visited. Centres aim for 80% attendance and in some locations actively follow-up children who are absent. The problems with the enrolment database and the incompleteness of the attendance data make it impossible to know whether or not, at an aggregate level, MPP3 centres are meeting their target of 80% attendance. The evaluation recommends that priority should be given to properly collected, aggregated and analysed attendance and enrolment data as without it no conclusions can be drawn from the tracking system (see below) into which such effort is being put.

A high quality ECE programme is one which integrates health, nutrition, education and socialisation in programmes for young children which are child-centred and based around play. While one of the benefits of ECE is that children enter formal schooling confident and ready to learn, a quality ECE programme does not include formal teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. The quality of the programmes in the MPP centres visited varied. Some showed elements of good practice while in other centres there was less evidence of an understanding of what constitutes good practice reflected in the programmes being largely teacher dominated and directed, activity-based learning centres very limited or absent and the work displayed was of prepared, adult-directed children's work. The evaluation recommends that more attention be directed to consistency of understanding and practice of quality of ECE in MPP centres.

The evaluation team visited eight schools spread across the three divisions and interviewed six principals and 18 new-entrant teachers. With one exception, the teachers all told us that there was a distinct difference between students who entered school having had some ECE and those who did not, and that ECE played a major role in preparing children for school. Furthermore, in those schools which took a number of students from MPP centres, the teachers reported that the students from MPP centres were as well equipped as students coming from any other ECE centres.

The MPP3 team has put huge effort and energy into tracking the progress of children who have graduated from MPP centres. A database of outcomes of students who graduated from MPP centres during 2009 is being constructed. While acknowledging the reasons and affirming the effort that has gone into the design and implementation of the system, the evaluation team is not convinced that the tracking system gathers sufficiently robust information about student outcomes to justify the

commitment of resources. The team is of the view that the value of good quality ECE has been established through international research and that the focus of MPP data collection and analysis should be on measuring access and ensuring programme quality.

### **Community capacity**

Objective 2 of MPP3 is that by 2011, 44 communities will have the capacity to manage ECE centres through community education committees and community interest groups. Communities are identified as potential sites for an MPP centre either through community profiling of areas known to be disadvantaged or when a community approaches SC Fiji and asks for assistance to establish a centre. With the objective to expand and for centres to achieve MoE recognition driving MPP3, there is a temptation for MPP to respond to requests from communities which have a more organised community able to support the development and running of one and be more likely to be able to navigate the process towards MoE recognition. The evaluation found that every centre visited is of value to the children who attend but that three of the 16 centres visited are not in communities of greatest need.

With one exception an active CEC was supporting each centre visited. All CECs were actively involved in the management of the centre including provision of premises, recruitment and support of community teacher aides and raising funds to pay teachers and purchase resources. SC Fiji has initiated a range of structured and deliberate activities to build and support communities to take on the management of MPP centres.

All the centres visited were trying to pay their community teacher aides regularly, with most endeavouring to pay each teacher between \$15 and \$20 a week. Not all communities could pay their teachers regularly and relied upon the goodwill of the teachers to continue working even if no payment could be made. In some areas community teacher aides were willing to continue teaching even when the community could not afford to pay them regularly. In and around Suva, CECs and teachers reported if where payment could not be made teachers were not so willing, or perhaps economically able, to continue in the role and were forced to look for other income generating options. All the centres visited in Suva and Nasinu required attendance fees and that some parents reported that their children were unable to attend the centre if fees had not been paid.

### **Developing teacher capability**

Objective 3 of MPP3 is that by 2011, the capacity of community volunteers as ECE teachers has been developed to enable sustainability of the community centres and a quality ECE for the children.

Once community teacher aides have been selected by their community they attend a five to six week 'attachment' at a kindergarten recognised by the MoE. After this and with the support of the ECE teacher educator they begin to run the MPP programme in their community. Project data provided to the evaluation shows that 90% of community teacher aides have completed training attachment and 10% have not but evaluation findings suggest project records may be somewhat out of date in this respect.

After the initial attachment community teacher aide training consists of on-site coaching and mentoring, periodic workshops, and monthly 'update' meetings. At times community teacher aides have difficulty getting to the ongoing training because of travel cost and the evaluation recommends that this is addressed. The evaluation found that a more structured training package for community teacher aides is necessary if programme quality issues are to be addressed. Further, MPP ECE staff need to recognise their role as educators of community teacher aides rather than as simply advisors.

### **Efficiency**

Objective 4 of MPP3 is to strengthen the capacity of SC Fiji MPP staff to effectively provide management, monitoring and evaluation of the project.

A great deal of work has been done since 2008 to develop and implement systems and processes to strengthen SC Fiji as an organisation and the delivery and accountability of MPP3. A functioning

board guides the work of SC Fiji, the CEO manages the organisation well and the staffing structures are appropriate to the achievement of organisational objectives. Financial management processes in particular have been strengthened.

The evaluation found that project governance needs to be strengthened and recommends that the Advisory Committee be revitalised with additional members, renamed as the Steering Committee and given the responsibilities of governing the MPP. Management of MPP is highly objectives driven. All staff, especially the district co-ordinators, are focused on the revised objectives, particularly Objective 1, the expansion of the programme. The project is appropriately and adequately staffed with staffing resources directed both towards establishing ECE centres and building the community capacity to govern and manage them. Roles are well-defined and appropriate and accountabilities are clear. There are, as in any organisation, instances where improvements in individuals' capacity and capability would strengthen the project and improve efficiency. On the other hand, salaries are not high and SC Fiji has done well to retain some experienced staff who add real value to project.

The evaluation considered SCNZ's role in MPP management. All three parties, NZAID, SCNZ and SC Fiji identified both benefits and frustrations with the current management arrangements and the evaluation found that the current three-way management arrangements are not working optimally for any of the parties. The evaluation recommends that the arrangement be revisited and that SC Fiji reports directly to NZAID either in Fiji, or in Wellington.

The evaluation identified four areas in which cost savings could be made. SC Fiji to report directly to NZAID, rationalising reporting requirements, reviewing the currently budgeted need for additional personnel and increasing the proportion of MPP staff able and willing to drive project vehicles.

### **Supporting factors and challenges**

A range of factors support the success of MPP and the achievement of outcomes. MPP is based on a sound development model where need is established, communities are supported to open a centre and then governance and management of the centre is progressively passed to communities which are assisted through the process to integrate them with other ECE provision. SC Fiji is a respected NGO and the MPP project has credibility. SC Fiji and MPP management systems are generally strong. The continuity of NZAID funding has allowed the project to develop and grow with SC Fiji now having one of, if not the, strongest team of ECE specialists in Fiji. The necessity to periodically review funding arrangements has provided the project with much needed review points from which it has been able to reflect, learn and refine objectives. Community teacher aides in many centres are not paid regularly but only when funding permits, yet they continue to run sessions regularly and demonstrate impressive commitment to the children's education.

Among the challenges MPP faces it that it lacks strong governance which would help priorities to be established and maintained and would play a key role in maintaining the quality of the ECE programme offered; the quality of MPP programmes varies; the limited engagement with the MoE makes it very difficult to address the complexity and delays of the recognition process; supporting the payment and therefore retention of community teacher aides without creating an access barrier through attendance fees is difficult; and, data collection systems are both onerous and not sufficiently robust to give confidence in their output.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The evaluation found that MPP is highly relevant, reasonably effective and adequately efficient.

It is relevant in that its purposes and objectives address the needs, priorities and capacities of the impoverished communities for which it is designed, it aligns with the priorities of the Fiji Government and is consistent with their plans and policy statements for ECE. MPP is based on a sound development model and largely meets the indicators for good development practice. The programme fits well with NZAID's Fiji Country Programme Strategy 2005-2010, particularly in its focus on informal communities.

While improvements can always be made, MPP is reasonably effective. Children attending MPP centres are benefitting from an early childhood education which is preparing them for school as well as other ECE services. It is well-structured with resources devoted both to developing and supporting the operation of the centres and to enabling community groups to govern and manage the centres. The evaluation found the MPP approach likely to be the most effective way of achieving tangible and sustainable benefits given current constraints around government funding and support in Fiji. The project could benefit from more focus on indicators of programme quality, more active pursuit of MoE recognition for centres, and a more structured approach to training community teacher aides.

Efficiency has improved over the years of MPP and can always be better. However, SC Fiji is a well-managed organisation which provides a sound framework for the operation of MPP. Within the project itself governance needs to be strengthened and management arrangements could be enhanced. The collection and collation of both outcome and project management data is onerous and does not provide a good return on investment. While financial management in the organisation has been improved MPP budget management needs to stay in line with agreements.

The sustainability of MPP is of concern. There is no reasonable likelihood of significant government funding in the medium-term and MPP will need external funding for the foreseeable future. SC Fiji must engage more actively with potential funding partners both donors and corporate.

### Recommendations

1. **MPP to continue and be supported.** The evaluation has found MPP to be highly relevant, reasonably effective and acceptably efficient. Appropriately targeted, based on a sound development model and operated by a respected CSO, MPP has increased the access to ECE for children in impoverished communities in the absence of meaningful government support.
2. **Consistent quality of ECE practice needs to be assured.** This should be led by a Project Steering Committee and based on the indicators of effective practice found in Appendix 13. Reconsider the objective to expand the number of centres at the end of the current funding agreement and have a period of consolidation before considering further expansion.
3. **Review the objective to expand.** The objective to expand is driving the project. At times this is at the expense of quality. Future objectives should focus on ensuring programme quality and on moving the majority of existing MPP centres to MoE recognition before further expansion is considered.
4. **Retain a focus on impoverished communities.** The push for expansion has led to some new centres being developed in more established settlements and communities. There is a risk that the most needy children and communities, for whom the project was designed, may be overlooked.
5. **SC Fiji to actively plan for the sustainability of the project.** SC Fiji should further develop its relationship with donors other than NZAID working in the education sector in Fiji, as well as commercial sponsorship, and explore the potential for investment in MPP.
6. **Strengthen project governance.** The Advisory Committee should be renamed, given the mandate to be a project steering committee, and actively engaged to steer the project. The membership could be increased to six to eight members with a mixture of ECE and management skills, and including knowledge of the policies and processes of the MoE. A structure for involvement of the Committee in the governance of the project should be established to ensure that the project benefits from the Committee's experience and expertise.
7. **Sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education.** The sustainability of MPP is seriously threatened by the slow progress towards MoE recognition of MPP centres. Developing an MoU with the Ministry of Education outlining respective obligations and mechanisms for engagement is a priority.
8. **Clarify the role of MPP teachers as ECE educators.** The foremost role of MPP ECE teachers is to train community teacher aides on whom the quality of the programmes depends. MPP teachers must themselves be trained as ECE educators with a clear understanding of quality ECE practice

and proactively take responsibility for the training of community teacher aides rather than providing only advice and support.

9. **A properly structured training package for community teacher aides.** A properly structured training package for community teacher aides is required if quality ECE practice is to be consistent across MPP centres. An outline of what such a programme could look like is attached as Appendix 9.
10. **Reimburse community teacher aides' travel costs and expenses.** Trained and effective community teacher aides are central to the success of MPP. Travel costs to attend training are currently a barrier for some which should be addressed by reimbursement.
11. **Increase progress to MoE recognition.** A more targeted programme of advice and guidance for CECs, starting as soon as the CEC is established, to ensure they are better informed of requirements for MoE recognition, salary grant and building grant, and support for them through the process.
12. **Structured professional development programmes for MPP staff.** Professional development programmes for MPP staff focused on their responsibilities under 9 and 11 above in place to ensure that all staff have a common understanding of a high quality ECE programme, that MPP teachers are assisted to become teacher educators and that CDOs are able to provide the guidance required by CECs to ensure progress towards the goals of MoE recognition and independence.
13. **Monitoring and reporting requirements relevant, useful and manageable.** Monitoring, reporting and accountability have clearly been strengthened. Priority should now be given to monitoring and reporting enrolment and attendance data and programme quality indicators. SC Fiji and NZAID should discuss data requirements and agree on which monitoring and reporting systems should be prioritised.
14. **Consider the options for increased efficiency and cost savings outlined in this report.**

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Mobile Playgroup Project

1. The Mobile Playgroup Project (MPP) was introduced by Save the Children Fiji (SC Fiji) in 2002 in response to the need to improve access to and quality of early childhood education (ECE) for children in economically disadvantaged communities.
2. The goal of MPP during the pilot phase was to provide basic education for economically disadvantaged children using a mobile kindergarten. MPP was also designed to support increased awareness of children's development and rights, and to develop the capacity of communities to manage playgroups. Initially, a qualified ECE teacher took a truck fitted out with the equipment to run an ECE session into informal communities and ran a morning or afternoon session for pre-school children. Supported by volunteers, teachers would offer up to three sessions a week in each participating community and the volunteers would frequently run a fourth session themselves.
3. The original objectives of the Phase 1 and 2 of the project were:
  - Objective 1: To increase access to early childhood education for economically disadvantaged children, initially in two locations (Suva and Labasa) so as to enhance their learning capabilities and preparedness for formal education.
  - Objective 2: To provide mothers and other primary caregivers in the target communities with information and support on a range of issues including parenting so as to increase their knowledge of children's developmental needs and enhance parental effectiveness.
  - Objective 3: To increase the capacity of targeted communities to develop and manage a local early childhood education programme and encourage self-help action.
  - Objective 4: to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme through systematic monitoring of expected outputs with a view to modifying and expanding the mobile kindergarten concept as required.
4. NZAID supported MPP Phase 1 and 2 from 2002-2006 with funding of approximately NZ\$757,000. Phase 3 of MPP was submitted to NZAID by SCNZ in April 2007 and proposed an expansion of MPP to squatter communities in Suva, Labasa and the Western Division while maintaining support services to established playgroups. NZAID agreed to support MPP3 from July 2008 (July 2008-June 2011), with funding of up to FJ \$1,428,879
5. Following a review of MPP in 2008, objectives were revised to address areas of weakness identified through the review. The new objectives were designed to expand the project, to strengthen community commitment and capacity to manage MPP, to build the capability of community volunteers as ECE teachers and to put more focus on the management of the project by SC Fiji. The new project objectives guiding MPP Phase 3, developed in October 2008, are these:
  - Objective 1: By 2011, 27 new ECE centres established and a total of 44 centres functioning and recognized by Fiji Ministry of Education
  - Objective 2: By 2011, 44 communities have the capacity to manage ECE centres through Community Education Committees (CECs) and community interest groups.
  - Objective 3: By 2011, the capacity of community volunteers as ECE teachers has been developed to enable sustainability of the community centres and a quality ECE for the children.
  - Objective 4: Strengthen the capacity of SC Fiji MPP staff to effectively provide management, monitoring and evaluation of the project.

6. Through the latter years of Phase 2 and in Phase 3 the project has changed from offering ECE sessions from the MPP truck to most communities having a dedicated or shared location from which the sessions are operated. ECE teachers employed by SC Fiji still come to the communities but their role has become one of training and supporting volunteers selected by the community to take on the role of community teacher aides. More recently, the role of community development officer (CDO) has been created to bring direct focus to building the capacity of communities through CECs to govern and manage the centres.
7. This evaluation covers MPP activities from inception in 2002 to the completion of Year One of Phase 3 in June 2009. The study evaluated the activities of MPP in Suva, Labasa, and Lautoka.

## 1.2 The development and policy context

8. The military coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006 along with food and fuel price increases and a declining global economy have had significant negative impacts on Fiji. These problems have been compounded more recently by the turmoil in international money markets and the further downturn in the worldwide economic conditions. Major challenges over the medium-term include the rebuilding of the economy, resolving land tenure issues and developing alternative agricultural crops to replace loss of export earnings from the sugar industry. As a consequence of these issues there is an ongoing movement of people who have been displaced, or for economic necessity, moving from their land to urban areas.
9. More than half of Fiji's population now lives in the rapidly expanding urban areas. It is estimated that close to 15% of the population lives in over 200 informal settlements around the country. The greater Suva area has the largest number of such settlements and it is estimated that by 2010, the Suva/Nausori corridor will have 15,000 households with 100,000 people in informal settlements.
10. These settlements have poor infrastructure and housing, limited hygiene and sanitation services and consequently high health risks. These health risks are compounded by substance abuse and high levels of domestic violence. Disputes with neighbours and other ethnic groups are common, as are disputes over community leadership. In purely economic terms, it is estimated that 60-80% of squatters are living below the poverty line. Significant barriers for families to achieve a sustainable livelihood include low levels of education and business literacy, limited budgeting experience, and limited access to funding. Women-headed households are over-represented in informal settlements and women are often required to undertake work in their communities as well as to provide an income, food, and security for their families.
11. The Fiji Government has expressed concern at the alarming rate of increase in informal settlements, yet it seems that informal settlements will increase rather than diminish in the foreseeable future.
12. In 2005 NZAID's Fiji Country Programme Strategy 2005-2010 was developed through a joint exercise between the governments of Fiji and New Zealand. The objectives of the Strategy are:
  1. To reduce the hardship suffered by those living in informal and squatter settlements in Fiji.
  2. To strengthen governance, particularly in the areas of public service, law and justice and human rights.
  3. To support the work of civil society organisations and communities to reduce the vulnerability to poverty of people experiencing high levels of hardship.<sup>1</sup>
13. Following the December 2006 coup and the ongoing political volatility in Fiji, the New Zealand Government reoriented its aid to Fiji away from government to civil society. Assisting informal settlements and strengthening civil society were the focus of the \$5 million aid allocation for Fiji in 2008/09.
14. In April 2009 Cabinet approved a new mission statement for New Zealand's official development assistance (ODA) programme. The mission statement is to *'Support sustainable development in developing countries, in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable*

<sup>1</sup> NZAID (2005) Fiji Background Paper and NZAID/Fiji Country Programme Strategy

and prosperous world.' The new mission and policy settings put the Pacific at the forefront of ODA, and there is to be a focus on sustainable economic development.

15. The 2005-2010 NZAID/Fiji Aid Programme Strategy remains largely in place. Programme implementation is now focused on the Strategy's objectives of promoting democratic governance, strengthening civil society and assisting people living in poverty, especially those in informal settlements.

### 1.3 The method

16. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a basis for NZAID, SC Fiji and SCNZ to determine outcomes and plan future directions. The evaluation will be used to inform programming discussions and for further development of accountability reporting.

#### Evaluation objectives

The evaluation has three objectives, each underpinned by a number of questions.

- 1 To determine the relevance of MPP from inception to June 2009.
- 2 To determine the effectiveness of MPP from inception to June 2009.
- 3 To determine the efficiency of MPP from inception to June 2009.

The questions sitting under each of these three objectives can be found in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. (Appendix 1)

Full details of the evaluation method can be found in the evaluation plan attached to this report as Appendix 2. What follows is a summary of methods.

#### Data sources and collection methods

17. Project documents such as funding agreements, PIDs, letters of variation, budgets, six monthly and annual reports, evaluation reports, appraisals, letters and emails were provided by NZAID prior to the evaluation visit, and reviewed by the team. Further project documents were reviewed in Fiji with key examples retained by team. Relevant academic and expert papers were reviewed prior to departure. Some examples of work reviewed include papers on informal communities in Fiji, civil society facilitation in Fiji, and ECE quality indicators. Further details can be found in Appendix 3.
18. A great deal of monitoring data is now collected by MPP. The evaluation examined the extent and nature of the data as well as the systems for capture and analysis. This was largely accessed through the Project Manager who takes primary responsibility for collection and analysis of project data. Particular attention was given to outcome data recorded through the student tracking system. The database contains full details from 65 children who graduated from MPP centres during 2009 which represents approximately 20% of the 300 graduates of MPP that year. The tracking database also contains details on 71 graduates (4%) of MPP in earlier years (1700 graduates up to 2008), giving a total of 136 students on the database in Feb 2010. This is not a purposive sample but is the number who have been able to be successfully tracked to date.
19. Interviews, individual or group interviews as appropriate, were conducted with representatives from all groups of stakeholders. NZAID staff were all interviewed at their offices by two team members. SC Fiji staff were interviewed individually on-site with key staff members such as the CE and the Project Manager interviewed more than once. Other conversations with SC Fiji staff also occurred while travelling to and from MPP centres. In most cases the evaluation team visited the other stakeholders in Fiji and interviewed them at their locations, although in a few cases those stakeholders came to the team which was based at the SC Fiji office in Suva.
20. MPP sites were selected for the evaluation team by the local team member in conjunction with SC Fiji. A misunderstanding led to all sites initially selected being sites which had begun under MPP3, but when the evaluation team asked to visit some sites which had been operating longer, this was readily accommodated and replacements were made in the itinerary. However, as one

of the sites for the evaluation Lautoka has only been established under MPP3 there is still a preponderance of recently established sites in the sample.

21. At the MPP centres the team were usually welcomed and invited to observe a session in progress. The team asked for planning and monitoring documents which were reviewed by one team member during the observation. This was usually the local team member who was already very familiar with the way sessions are conducted. At the conclusion of the formal part of the session one team member interviewed the teachers, another any CEC members who were present and the third team member interviewed any parents who were at the session. Interviews were private in the sense that they usually took place between individuals in an open plan setting where other conversations and activities were happening. Where possible the team matched the gender of the interviewer and respondent. CEC members were interviewed individually at some centres and as a group at others. The 'sample' of CEC members and parents interviewed during visits to centres was made up of those who were there at the time of the visit. Both genders and a range of ethnicities were represented among those interviewed. Visits to schools usually included a brief interview with the principal outlining our purpose, followed by interviews with the teachers of Class 1.
22. Interviews were conducted as conversations based on semi-structured interview guides which can be found in Appendix 4. Structured interviews are used where quantification of the data is required but as quantification of interview data was not envisaged for this evaluation, and interviews took place during and after playgroup sessions, semi-structured interviews were seen to offer flexibility and other advantages. Where there are differences (language, culture, age, social background, education) between interviewer and interviewee as in this evaluation, semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to pick up on the language and conceptual framework of the interviewee (eg 'kindergarten'), and to reflect that language in subsequent questions. Semi-structured interviews allowed interviews to develop as conversations that could be conducted while parents were tending to their children or supervising groups of children. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the interviewee to add new information (eg charging fees) and for that information to be followed up.
23. The team observed the delivery of MPP activities in 16 sites. The purpose of the observation was to identify characteristics of effective ECE and observations were guided by the observation checklist attached as Appendix 8.
24. At the end of the in-country visit a workshop was held with senior staff of SC Fiji and a representative of SCNZ. The purpose of the workshop was to present and discuss preliminary findings and to ensure that no relevant information had been overlooked. Other SC Fiji staff and external stakeholders in Suva were invited to morning tea on the final day of the evaluation and given an overview of preliminary findings.
25. Table 1 provides a summary of the primary data sources for the evaluation. Details can be found in Appendices 6 and 7.

Table 1: Data sources

Data source	Wellington	Suva	Labasa	Lautoka	Total
MPP centres visited		7	5	4	16
Community teacher aides interviewed		11	7	5	23
CEC members interviewed		9	12	12	34
Parents interviewed		18	13	9	40
Schools visited		3	3	2	8
Principals interviewed			3	3	6
Teachers interviewed		8	9	4	21
SC Fiji staff interviewed		7	2	3	12
NZAID personnel interviewed	6				6
Other stakeholders interviewed	3*			2	5

\* including one by email from overseas

26. The team visited almost 60% of MPP centres, interviewed just over 60% of community teacher aides and spoke to just under half of all CEC members.

### Data analysis

27. In this evaluation data analysis was on-going, taking place throughout the data collection process. As the different forms of data were gathered, the team thought about and discussed emerging themes and issues, adapting and changing data collection methods where necessary. Evaluation team members took notes of their interviews and these were shared and discussed at the debrief meeting held at the end of each day of the in-country visit. Emerging findings, themes and issues were identified through discussion. Where, after two or three interviews based on an interview schedule developed in the planning phase, participants were raising issues that had not been anticipated, the schedule for subsequent interviews was refined to include these issues.
28. Quantitative data was collected from SC Fiji's electronic and paper files. A sample of students was followed through the tracking system from source data (school reports), into the recording system, through to SC Fiji's analysis.
29. Interview data was collected through note taking. Qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews was analysed by theme. This type of analysis is inductive or grounded, which means that the evaluation allows the themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed upon it. As well as allowing themes to emerge from the data, the analysis always referenced data back to the evaluation questions to ensure that data gathered provided evidence for evaluative judgments reached. The team reviewed interview data against the interview guide identifying common themes, outlying views and potentially significant new data that may need to be followed up in subsequent interviews. Themes and issues are reported overall, and where there are contrasting viewpoints from different stakeholder perspectives, this is mentioned.
30. The daily team meetings during the in-country visit were a crucial data analysis tool that the team used to share the data gathered that day and integrate it into their emerging findings.
31. The presentation of initial findings to the key stakeholders was another form of data analysis as ideas and emerging conclusions were tested and refined in light of their feedback.

### Roles of evaluation team members

The local team member, an ECE specialist, was primarily responsible for:

- organising and co-ordinating visits to MPP sites
- undertaking observations of teaching practice and reviewing centre documentation
- introducing evaluation team members to stakeholders
- contributing to interviews
- advising and assisting with travel arrangements
- participate in daily debriefing meetings

- contributing to draft and final reports.

The responsibilities of the education specialist were to:

- undertake structured observations at MPP centres
- lead the interviews with teachers and CEC committee members at the centres
- identify and review quality indicators for ECE and assess MPP against indicators
- co-lead interviews with SC Fiji project team members (with evaluation specialist)
- participate in daily debriefing meetings
- contribute to draft and final reports.

The responsibilities of the team leader and evaluation specialist were to:

- manage the team
- allocate responsibilities and support team members to complete them
- co-ordinate daily meetings to analyse data and accommodate emerging issues, and to record the conclusions of the meetings
- conduct interviews with key national and international stakeholders including NZAID, SCNZ, SC Fiji, Fiji MoE, Fiji Childcare Assoc
- co-lead interviews with SC Fiji project team members (with ECE specialist)
- participate in centre visits focusing on interviews with parents and families
- lead end of visit workshop and presentation of findings
- prepare draft and final reports.

#### Limitations of the evaluation

32. The scope of the evaluation, determined by time and budget, meant that not every centre was visited nor was every staff member interviewed. However, the evaluation team is confident that a good sample of both was achieved.
33. The evaluation was asked to identify whether MPP has led to better educational performance for students who attended. The team considered ways to gather data to answer this question including identifying a comparison group to assess if school performance was different from children from a similar background but identifying a comparison group was not possible. Without a large scale, randomised control trial well beyond the scope of this evaluation, or a longitudinal prospective study that tracks children from infancy through their education, it is very difficult to prove beyond question whether and how early childhood education influences learning outcomes at school. Robust, expensive studies of this kind are rare in New Zealand, uncommon internationally and almost certainly beyond the infrastructure, resources and current data management systems of Fiji. While the tracking data collected by SC Fiji gives some indications of student performance this evaluation has placed more weight on the interview data collected from Class 1 teachers about the comparative readiness for school of children who have had ECE and those who have not. However, a limitation of this approach is that schools do not keep records of which ECE service children have attended and during interviews with teachers MPP staff had to remind teachers of the children who had come through from the centres.
34. The evaluation met challenges in engaging with the Fiji Ministry of Education (MoE). The evaluation team made over 30 approaches to the MoE for an interview, resulting in a 30 minute meeting on the day of our departure. This is indicative of serious under-resourcing in the ECE area, as well as wider-scale upheaval in the public service caused by the sudden introduction in 2008 of a compulsory 55 years retirement age. This inability to engage has limited conversations about the long-term sustainability of the MPP.
35. While a mass of data is collected by the MPP not all of it is of high quality, and the IT skills of some of those managing the data limit its usefulness. An example of this is enrolment and attendance data which is not robust enough for inclusion in this report. Other data reported to the team was not supported by evidence gathered during site visits. While SC Fiji has put significant effort into tracking students who have attended MPP centres this data is still very partial and could not support meaningful analysis.