

Background

The Pacific Regional Blindness Prevention Programme was first implemented by the Fred Hollows Foundation New Zealand in 2002, with support from the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID). The programme is now operational (through either direct eye service links or involvement of eye care personnel) in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu,. Although the objectives of the programme have changed over time, they have remained focused on developing and promoting eye care human resources and clinical services in response to the needs and resources of Pacific countries and in keeping with existing health policy, systems and structures of these countries.

The objectives of the programme arose out of an audit of eye prevalence in four countries in 2003 and a mid-term review of the programme in 2005. These relate to: networks development for collegial support for eye health professionals in the Pacific; design and deliver of a regional, university conferred, portable competency-based qualification for Pacific eye health nurses; design and deliver of eye doctor training that is comprehensive, competency-based and integrated with the broader aims of blindness prevention, including disease control and service and infrastructure development; development of operational research capacity with eye health professionals in the Pacific; provision of ongoing support for Pacific eye care workers following graduation from eye nurse and eye doctor postgraduate courses; and the building of the capacity of Vision 2020 Fiji to be the peak advocacy body in eye care in Fiji.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the Foundation has achieved the overall goal, objectives and activities outlined in its programme agreement with NZAID.

The objectives of the evaluation were:

- assess the extent to which the programme has achieved its intended goal and objectives and in particular as reframed in the second phase of the programme
- to provide recommendations regarding the future direction of the Pacific Regional Blindness Prevention programme and the level of input from NZAID.

Main Findings

Provision of effective services

The review found that the objectives of the programme have been substantially met, despite a number of constraints that have emerged throughout the programme's implementation. It noted that the Foundation has adopted an innovative approach to best meet the needs of the Pacific, focusing on the sustainable development of services and the people who deliver those services. It concluded that the Foundation has developed blindness prevention programmes of inestimable value with benefits that will become increasingly evident during the next five to ten years.

Impact

The programme was widely regarded as having made a significant and positive difference to eye care in the Pacific. The key factors underlying this positive impact were:

- the ability to offer training for both doctors and nurses in the Pacific
- training that reflected, and is responsive to the needs of, the region
- a programme that does not stop at the completion of training, but provides the necessary systems development and ongoing support for eye care personnel and their clinical services
- ongoing attempts to strengthen and grow the regional network of eye health workers.

Value for Money

The review further noted that the programme had provided value for money for NZAID. This conclusion was attributed to the existing relationships that the Foundation had with its stakeholders, and because NZAID was not the sole funding provider. For example, the Foundation had provided funding for buildings and for scholarships for training nurses and doctors. It had also entered into an agreement with the School of Population Health University of Auckland to conduct research which could be used to ensure education remains appropriate to Pacific eye workers' needs and those of their health systems.

Key Issues and Learning for NZAID

The review noted the importance of effective networks both within countries and in the region among health professionals involved in the programme. However, issues of leadership and resourcing were also important for sustainability. It was felt that the Foundation may need to play a stronger coordination role in the immediate future to address the lack of an [effective] eye care association in the Pacific.

The issue of sustainability was also apparent in recommendations for an ongoing key role for the Foundation including:

- ensuring strengthening of the capacity and sustaining the programmes of the Pacific Eye Institute
- facilitating relationships with professional bodies to address workforce issues
- guidance and advice to governments on purchasing, quality and standards in eye care departments, and managing 'volume of scale' issues, particularly where individual countries are too small to have the capacity and capability themselves.

The review identified some valuable lessons in the principles on which the Foundation model of service development and delivery was based. These were considered to be a key contributor to the programme's positive impact:

- for Pacific people, by Pacific people
- integration into wider health services (e.g. diabetes care)
- focus on sustainability through workforce development
- recognition that value can be added by facilitation (e.g. bulk purchase of consumables, meeting coordination) rather than by direct service delivery
- advocacy with government agencies
- insistence on quality services and supplies—second-best is not good enough.

The review noted that these principles have the potential to translate to other health and disability services in the Pacific, and could well be recognised as features of programmes that are likely to have a positive impact. The fact that operating theatres, outreach clinics have been upgraded, protocols developed and infection control standards have been improved, highlighted how this programme is impacting on the quality of wider health services.

The other lesson identified in the review related to sustainability was the importance of the commitment from governments, in terms of valuing their workforce (training, retention, recognition and development of appropriate standards for services) and recognition of the value of the programme.

Follow-up

The evaluation made 11 recommendations for future support in the region. NZAID considered the recommendations appropriate. As NZAID/the Australian Agency for International Development and the Fred Hollows Foundation of New Zealand were pursuing a joint programme which involves a scale-up, the recommendations will be addressed through further design work (where appropriate) as part of the inception phase of the new programme of support.

To request a copy of the full report email aidevaluation@mfat.govt.nz and quote the reference number - Eva0818.