

**Vanuatu Secondary School Extension Project Phase II
(VSSEP2)**

AidWorks Initiative Number INE991

INDEPENDENT COMPLETION REPORT

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Aid Activity Summary

Aid Activity Name	Vanuatu Secondary School Extension Project, Phase II		
AidWorks initiative number	INE991		
Form of Aid	Project		
Commencement date	06 April 2004	Completion date	30 June 2008
Total Australian \$	A\$8.6 million		
Total other \$	GOV: A\$0.23 million in kind Local villages: coral, sand, water, labour		
Delivery organisation(s)	Reeves Construction Melbourne, Australia		
Implementing Partner(s)	Project Implementation Unit, Ministry of Education, Government of Vanuatu		
Country/Region	Vanuatu/Pacific		
Primary Sector	Education		
Key VSSEP2 Dates:			
6 April 2004	Memorandum of Understanding between Government of Australia and the Government of Vanuatu		
9 May 2004	Signing of Contract with AusAID and Contractor		
December 2005	Mid term review VSSEP2		
June 2009	Development of Independent Completion report (ICR)		
Initial contract value			
Final contract value	AU\$ 8.6 million		
Final Initiative Quality of Rating	4–5		

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The views represented in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or Vanuatu Ministry of Education.

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Contents

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

II INTRODUCTION..... 4

III EVALUATION FINDINGS..... 6

IV EVALUATION CRITERIA RATINGS..... 21

V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 21

ANNEXES

- A1 Terms of Reference
- A2 Methodology
- A3 Persons Interviewed
- A4 Secondary School Enrolments, Vanuatu and the Five VSSEP2 Schools
- A5 Distribution of boys and girls in VSSEP schools and in Vanuatu senior secondary schools overall
- A6 New Designs for the Comprehensive High School: From Concept to Practice
- A7 M&E Plan VSSEP2
- A8 VSSEP2 Site Related Imprest Costs

I Executive Summary

Background

VSSEP2 covered four year period 2004-2008 at accost of \$8.7 million with the goal of expanding senior secondary education to accommodate increasing national demand for secondary and tertiary graduates and provide increased contracting opportunity for small scale building contractors in order to develop the national construction industry.

VSSEPII comprised five components: Infrastructure Development, Small Scale Building Contractor Support, Procurement Management, Capacity Building in the Department of Education, and Project Management.

The VSSEP2 ICR provides an assessment of the appropriateness of the VSSEP2 design and objectives (relevance), the extent to which objectives were achieved or are expected to be achieved (effectiveness), the quality of project management and delivery (efficiency) and the extent to which the project made a difference in terms of Secondary education in Vanuatu (Impact).

Relevance

In general VSSEPP II was a relevant and important activity for Australia's aid program and its engagement with Vanuatu.

Australia has significant national interests in Vanuatu and the Pacific region at large encompassing social, economic, political and environmental concerns that are pursued through both bilateral and regional engagement. VSSEP2 had a clear rationale to support cooperation in social and economic development. It built upon a well regarded existing program (VSSEP I) and expanded to include new areas of demand and approaches (community partnership in construction).

However, while the rationale, intent and relevance of VSSEP2 objectives are clear, there are a number of limitations in the design that have impacted upon program efficiency and the achievement and measurement of VSSEP2 outcomes. In particular, there was inadequate social and economic measurement of impact and insufficient attention given to preparing for post-project maintenance of the facilities.

Effectiveness

VSSEP2 had some notable successes at the output level. Contractor Completion Report and stakeholder interviews confirm sound management practices and delivery of expanded school capacity in five outer island schools to accommodate more students in senior secondary education. However, it is still unclear the extent to which the increase in capacity of schools to accommodate increase number of senior secondary students has in fact materialised.

The Project made a major step forward in innovating new ways of engaging local contractors and villages in the construction of schools in their area. Although commercial contractors were used for the library and for specific specialist inputs (such as solar installations, electrical work and plumbing), all other construction work was undertaken by community groups and local contractors. This use of local resources proved very effective: costs were lowered, and quality was high.

Efficiency

In general, management and delivery of the VSSEP2 was well regarded by the MoE, schools and communities. The program was inclusive and in general responsive to schools needs. The community approach provided a sound structure for the provision of infrastructure works. The outputs, capacity building and contribution to MoE objectives were highly valued by all stakeholders.

The project initiated in a major shift in cost reduction through (a) use of AVIs, (b) use of free community resources, and (c) use of small local contractors and community labour groups.

Impacts

Major positive impacts were

- village livelihoods
- village skills development
- village career and business advancement
- children schooled closer to home
- strengthened relationships between schools and communities
- better housing in the villages
- more space for education and boarding in the schools
- a raised status and participation for women in construction, and
- increased FAU experience in community-based school construction.

There were few but negative impacts around the tensions that arise when a large project puts money into poor communities, but these were for the most part resolved.

Sustainability

Improvements in village capacity, and in the capacity of the FAU, are generally sustainable. The community partnerships process appears to be embedded in the Government of Vanuatu and donor community, and will hopefully be further used. The school infrastructure itself is not as sustainable as it might have been, due to many factors, including the initial budgeting and scoping; project design; building design; chronic problems in school management and budgets; an over-riding national bias towards investment in new construction.

Gender Equity

Gender equity and the question as to whether the project has impacted on this can be determined to a certain point although hard to verify especially with enrolment at senior secondary level. Generally there is no identifiable trend. At community level there was increased participation in the work force in some areas of construction—and this represented a significant breakthrough. But no significant carry over to empowerment of women at decision-making levels was reported or observed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

VSSEP2 is a successful and path-breaking project, which earns high praise from its direct beneficiaries: the schools and local communities. Within the limits of the design, the Project achieved its core objectives, and forge important innovations, the

most significant of which is the Community Partnerships. This core success is somewhat shadowed by weaknesses around the construction process, including weaknesses in: (a) building design, (b) maintenance process, (c) handover, and (d) completeness of scope.

Both the successes and weaknesses point to a wide range of lessons learned, that will be useful in future project designs.

Evaluation Criteria Ratings

Evaluation Criteria	Rating (1-6)
Relevance	5
Effectiveness	5
Efficiency	6
Sustainability	4
Gender Equality	4
Monitoring & Evaluation	3 ¹
Analysis & Learning	4

Rating scale:

Satisfactory		Less than satisfactory	
6	Very high quality	3	Less than adequate quality
5	Good quality	2	Poor quality
4	Adequate quality	1	Very poor quality

1 The design was the principal cause of less than adequate quality M&E. The design was carried out before current AusAID M&E policies were in place.

II Introduction

1 AusAID requires that an Independent Completion Report (ICR) be prepared for all projects with expenditure in excess of \$3 million. The purpose of the ICR is to assess the performance of an activity and in particular determine what worked well and what might be done differently and more effectively in the future. By documenting achievements and lessons learned, Independent Completion Reports contribute to the needs of AusAID, partner agencies and other stakeholders in improving the effectiveness of development cooperation.

2 This report provides an overall assessment of the appropriateness of the VSSEP2 design and objectives (relevance), the extent to which objectives were achieved or are expected to be achieved (effectiveness), the quality of program management and delivery (efficiency) and the extent to which the program made a difference in terms of Vanuatu Ministry of Education senior secondary education objectives (impact).

A. Activity Background

1 Vanuatu continues to face two major challenges in education. The primary priority is how to ensure that every child completes the basic education cycle of adequate quality. The second is to ensure access to an equitable and quality secondary education for a rising proportion of children.

2 In 1998, the Government of Australia funded VSSEP to upgrade the Montmarre and Onesua secondary schools on the island of Efate. In 2001, in line with its key priorities, Government of Vanuatu requested that VSSEP be extended to cover the upgrading of secondary schools on outer islands in order to increase access to senior secondary education. VSSEP2 commenced in May 2004 and was completed at end of June 2008. It targeted five secondary schools: Epi High School (Epi Island), Ranwadi Secondary School (Pentecost Island), Rensarie Secondary School (Malakula Island), Tafea College (Tanna Island) and Aore Adventist Secondary (Aore Island). The program covered the four-year period 2004-2008 and disbursed \$8.6 million.

3 The primary goal of VSSEP2 was:

expand senior secondary education to accommodate increasing national demand for secondary and tertiary graduates.

4 The secondary goal was:

provide increased contracting opportunity for small scale building contractors in order to develop the national construction industry.

5 The purpose described in the Project Design Document (PDD) was to:

- Increase the capacity of five secondary schools in the outer islands.
- Provide this increased capacity in a way that supports utilisation of small scale building contractors, local enterprise and community resources where practical.

6 VSSEP2 comprised five separately components:

- Infrastructure Development

- Small Scale Building Contractor Support
- Procurement Management
- Capacity Building in the Department of Education
- Project Management.

7 The project aimed to accommodate increasing demand for secondary education by developing 350 new senior secondary places in the five project schools. Activities included building or upgrading infrastructure such as classrooms, dormitories, libraries, ablution blocks, computer and other specialized learning areas. It also included staff accommodation and provision of some building materials for repair work.

B Evaluation Objectives and Questions

1 The objectives of the independent completion report of VSSEP2 were to:

- assess the extent to which the project resulted in the expected increase in senior secondary school enrolments in Vanuatu;
- assess the quality of the construction and the status of maintenance of infrastructure and equipment;
- evaluate the impact of the community contracting approach on the businesses and incomes of the participants;
- assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of VSSEP2; and
- identify any important lessons that can usefully inform future assistance to school or other infrastructure in the Pacific, especially Melanesia.

2 Main areas of investigation set in the TORs were:

- Creation of additional places in senior secondary streams
- Quality and cost of construction approach
- Maintenance and allocation of resources
- Economic impacts on the communities

C Evaluation Scope and Methods

1 The main objective of the ICR is to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of VSSEP2. Moreover, the ICR aims to identify lessons that can be applied to the design and implementation of similar programs in the future.

2 The VSSEP2 ICR assessment is based on a review of available program documents, including separate contractor Completion Report and discussions with key stakeholders. The ICR does not seek to duplicate the individual contractor Completion Report or review activities in the same degree of detail. Rather the ICR has independently reviewed the assessments and conclusions of contractor Completion Report.

3 The Managing Contractor (MC) has undertaken considerable consultation with local stakeholders in the preparation of their Activity Completion Reports. However,

there have been some gaps in its analyses, and little in the way of an overall evaluation of economic and social impact benefits of the project as a whole. There was a lack of availability of project documents at the school, MoE and MC level. This constrained the ICR team from adequately look at the costs and benefits of VSSEP as no data about costs of the construction works, community contracting works or subcontractor costs were available

4 The ICR Team met in Vila with representatives of the AusAID Post, Vanuatu MOE, Vanuatu Department of Economic and Strategic Management, EU, NZAID as well as private sector suppliers. The team also visited the five schools that were extended under the project. At each school site the team met with the principal, teachers, students, local village chiefs, village participants in the project, local subcontractors, and the PEO where possible. The field visit was conducted 24 May 09 to 06 June 09.

5 Further details can be found in Annex 1: Terms of Reference for preparation of the ICR, including key reference documents; Annex 2: Methodology, including the stakeholder consultation strategy; and Annex 3: Persons Interviewed.

D Evaluation Team

1 The AusAID review team, consisting of David Week (Team Leader, Architect), Mihaela Balan (M&E Specialist) and Abel Nako (Community and Education Specialist), conducted a field mission in Vanuatu 24 May 09 – 06 Jun 09, as the first step in preparing an Independent Completion Report (ICR).

2 This team provided a mix of skills and experience and expertise in (1) secondary school education in the Vanuatu; (2) supervising, managing and assessing school infrastructure projects in a developing country context; (3) experience with community contracting approaches to infrastructure development and/or maintenance; (4) expertise in conducting community impact assessments; and (5) strong evaluation skills. All of the team had worked before on development projects in Vanuatu. Two of the team spoke Bislama.

3 A key benefit for the ICR team was that the Team Leader, David Week, was also involved in the design and then implementation of VSSEP1.

4 None of the team had previously been involved in VSSEP2 design or implementation. David Week was a director of Assai, which bid unsuccessfully for VSSEP2.

III Evaluation Findings

A Relevance

1 Overall, the objectives of the project were relevant to AusAID and MoE with regard to education and village development to:

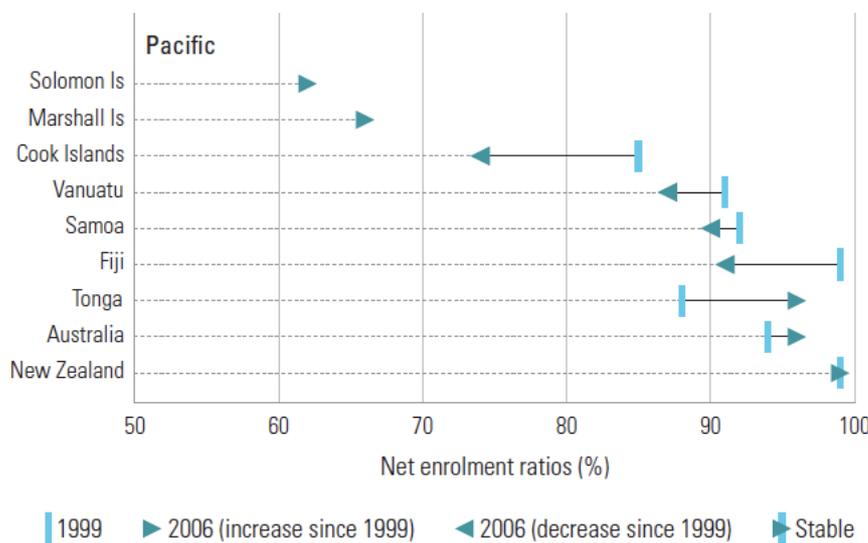
- expand secondary school education in Vanuatu
- increase the capacity of the Facilities and Assets Unit of the MoE
- build skills and livelihoods in villages surrounding the schools
- open the door to participation of small local subcontractors
- engage villages in school construction

- reduce cost of school construction.

VSSEP2 was relevant and appropriate in terms of both Vanuatu and AusAID policies at the time. The key deficiencies relate to the detail of the design, implementation strategies and new emerged MoE policies.

Vanuatu

2 Vanuatu invests heavily in education. At 23 per cent of government expenditure, the government’s investment in education is one of the highest in the world in proportion to total funding. In 2006, MOE developed a policy for Basic Education to be extended to year 8 (before up to year 6). Free education policy from year 1 to 6 is older than that, but not effective as primary school is not free: parents’ contribution is asked and it is compulsory. However, Vanuatu’s high level of investment has low returns. The 2007 survival rate to year 6 is 59%.² The 2009 UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report reports “Progress towards UPE is uneven within the [East Asia and Pacific] region. Most countries with data have improved their situation since 1999... [but] NERs declined in some Pacific island states, such as... Vanuatu.”³



Vanuatu is not on track to achieve UPE per EFA.

3 Two factors were identified to limit the chances of children from outer and rural islands: (i) low quality of schooling in remote areas reduces the chances of outer-island and rural children to pass gate keeping education exams; and (ii) in cases where they do succeed, income constraints make it difficult for them to attend secondary school based in urban centres far away from the village. A response from the GoV was to make secondary education accessible and more affordable through expansion of capacity and providing it in the outer islands.

4 VSSEP2 directly supported the Government’s development priorities—specifically increased access to secondary education, as reflected in the Ministry of Education Corporate Plans and the Priorities and Action Agenda (PAA), and sought to support PAA key priority area 6: *Education and human resource development* and

2 Literacy levels are low, with only 34 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 considered literate. Literacy rate for adults is 38% (2007 report by USP.)

3 UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009, Regional overview: East Asia and the Pacific

its policy objective *Improve access to education and ensure gender balance...*⁴ It is grounded in AusAID's Australia-Vanuatu Joint Development Cooperation Strategy 2005–2010 strategic objective 3: *Improving Service Delivery to populations in greatest hardship particularly in isolated rural communities and informal settlements in urban areas*⁵; and supports strategic objective 1: *Improved Governance through strengthening the stability and reach of key institutions*. The program also considered other development partner strategies (EU, NZAID, JICA) to ensure complementarity and harmonization of assistance in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Australia

5 Australia has significant national interests in Vanuatu economic, political, security and environment concerns which are pursued through both bilateral and regional (Pacific Islands Forum) engagement. At a country level, the Australia Vanuatu Joint Development Cooperation Strategy 2005–2010 provides a framework for Australian aid support to the country. The strategy focuses on addressing priority development issues, enhancing country capacity to support long-term stability for Vanuatu by accelerating development, including broad-based growth, and improving the welfare of the general. A new Vanuatu-Australia Partnership for Development was signed in May 2009, identifying education as one of four key priority outcomes.

6 AusAID has addressed the Strategy objective of increasing access to secondary education, through VSSEP and VSSEP2 projects. VSSEP2, that built upon a well regarded existing program (VSSEP), resulted in an expansion of Year 11–13 tuition and aimed at an increase in enrolments in these areas through 350 additional senior secondary school places created in 2006 for secondary students in five outer island locations.

Limitations

7 However, while the rationale, intent and relevance of the VSSEP2 are clear, there are a number of limitations in the design. These limits have impacted on the implementation and measurement of VSSEP outcomes. In particular:

- The goal and objectives hierarchy and the internal logic of the VSSEP2 lack simplicity, clarity and consistent terminology. The program has numerous goals and purposes and component objectives. All component level objectives are essentially process oriented – that is, the LOGFRAME focus is on completing administrative tasks and outputs rather than on results or outcomes of activities undertaken; linkages between project level components or outputs and higher level objectives is tenuous at best.
- The responsibility for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and more importantly the level of M&E were not clearly specified in the design. The M&E Plan developed by the MC looked only at process: providing a plan to complete administrative tasks. No subsequent M&E reports were prepared as the MTR proposed that M&E reporting to be part of quarterly reports. Quarterly reports were also a list of activities completed; mainly reporting against each compo-

4 Priorities of Action Agenda 2006-2015 "An Educated and Wealthy Vanuatu" June 2006, p.10

5 Australia-Vanuatu Joint Development Cooperation Strategy 2005-2010, p.8

ment; with no measurement or tracking of economic and social impact benefits or higher level objectives were observed.

- The design of the project made no specific reference to donor harmonisation, alignment or policy dialogue. This became more of a relevant issue following signature of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) with aid donors in Vanuatu establishing the Education Partners Group in 2006.

8 A series of new GoV policies issued during VSSEP2 implementation limited the achievement of the VSSEP2 goal: increase in enrolments in secondary education.

- In 2006 the government extended its policy of free basic education to include Years 7 and 8. This reform, adopted during VSSEP2 implementation, could affect the objective of increasing access to senior secondary schooling. On one hand, many students might drop school after year 8 as they are more mature and considered to have the necessary basic skills to work in the household or to follow alternative pathways. On the other hand the current enrolments do not show any increase in secondary education; this might be in fact due to this new policy. The policy and its effect on secondary education still need to be monitored.
- While the policy intention was to give adequate life skills to all students at the basic education level and some level of confidence to pursue a career in future, in neither technical nor academic streams has the policy change taken effect swiftly.
- At the same time it may appear that the policy initiative and the classroom construction may be running ahead of teacher training and curriculum change, impacting directly on the quality across the board in particular at junior secondary level.
- The intention of the policy change was to shift the fork in the streaming process from year 6 to year 8, and create alternative streams to prepare students for a wider range of future life options. However, exam filtering at year 8 became relaxed, and allowing more students to proceed to year 9 and 10. Poor filtering processes impacted on the ability of teachers to deliver effectively to a broader range of students, and quality was compromised. The original intention was to provide alternative pathways to vocational schools in secondary and top up schools has not come about because efforts in TVET programs at secondary level have been neither sustained nor consistent.

On the positive side: the facilities are there at least for the schools under the project and MOE is currently making efforts to develop a new curriculum direction.

Schools

9 The current management and funding regimes of most schools does not allow for sustainable maintenance, and this issue was not adequately covered in the design. This is discussed further, below, under “Sustainability”.

10 The design and therefore the project was overly weighted towards the construction of new space, and did not adequately address:

- repair of existing buildings;
- water supply and sanitation;

- power;
- teaching materials
- appropriately trained teachers.

It did not aim for “complete schools”, ready for instruction, complete with teachers, books, and students. Books were provided through the program and an extra budget was disbursed for books and textbooks. However, this was not done within a comprehensive “complete schools” strategy. Provision of teachers is a responsibility of the government, but there was no government-project coordination to ensure completeness for the target schools.

It should be noted that policies of the past have determined that schools are by and large located in unsettled and often remote areas. Most of the students enrolled are not from the local community, or even village or island. The parents are often living on a different island or province. As a result, local community involvement—while advantageous—does not equate to parental involvement, which may be necessary to achieve complete schools. Parental involvement must be driven at policy level.

Facilities and Assets Unit (FAU)

11 The FAU is currently structured as a project management office, rather than a facilities management office. The latter is more appropriate to National-level education facilities function. The project design did not look at the overall function of the unit in a National setting, before strengthening it.

Curriculum

The curriculum is not yet matched to market. Rural villages are home to 80% of the population of Vanuatu. Most ni-Vanuatu not engaged in formal employment. This is not going to change in the foreseeable future. The secondary school curriculum and the high school milieu do not yet include a balance of practical and academic skills required for improved village life, enterprise, or employment. Curriculum was not part of the VSSEP2 design, and is being addressed by VESAP.

B Effectiveness

1 The primary goal of VSSEP2 was to expand senior secondary education to accommodate increasing national demand for secondary and tertiary graduates. A secondary, but limited goal was to provide increased contracting opportunity for small scale building contractors in order to develop the national construction industry. The purpose described in the Project Design Document (PDD) was to:

- Increase the capacity of five secondary schools in the outer islands by an additional 350 places for senior secondary students.
- Provide this increased capacity in a way that supports utilisation of small scale building contractors, local enterprise and community resources where practical.

2 VSSEP2 had some notable successes at the output level. Contractor Completion Report and stakeholder interviews confirm sound management practices and delivery of expanded school capacity in five outer island schools to accommodate more students in senior secondary education.

3 However, it is still unclear the extent to which the increase in capacity of schools to accommodate increase number of senior secondary students has in fact materialised. Data collected from VEMIS for the period 2004–2009, included here in Annex 4, does not provide sufficient information for the ICR team to reach a conclusion: numbers in Senior secondary have dropped in senior secondary enrolments in some VSSEP2 schools, but increased in others. For example enrolments in Senior Secondary have dropped in 2008 in three out of five VSSEP2 schools, but increased in 2009 in four out of five schools.

Table: Changes in enrolment in five VSSEP schools (Senior Secondary)

Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Aore	100%	86%	120%	156%	74%	110%
Epi	na	na	na	na	117%	73%
Ranwadi	100%	100%	128%	115%	98%	123%
Rensarie	100%	75%	51%	227%	120%	124%
Tafea	100%	200%	90%	170%	74%	144%
Total	100%	96%	100%	174%	94%	114%

On the other hand, overall enrolments in senior secondary schools from 2004 to 2009 have increased or remained the same during the same period.

Table: Changes in enrolment overall in Vanuatu (Senior Secondary)

Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Overall	139%	102%	107%	108%	112%	100%

4 In order to reach a conclusion, AusAID/MoE would have needed to conduct a net impact evaluation and use control and treatment schools to determine if the increase in enrolments in some of VSSEP2 schools was due to the project and better facilities in schools. ICR team asked students what was the reason for choosing that particular VSSEP school. Some of the students mentioned facilities, but most of them talked about good teachers, or principal, or just because they did not have another option closer to home. Teachers reported that the improved teaching environments had a positive impact on their own morale.

5 The Project made a major step forward in innovating new ways of engaging local contractors and villages in the construction of schools in their area. Although commercial contractors were used for the library and for specific specialist inputs (such as solar installations, electrical work and plumbing), all other construction work was undertaken by community groups and local contractors, with each school using between one and three local contractors. One exception was Aore Adventist Academy that used only community groups. This use of local resources proved very effective: costs were lowered, and quality was high.

6 Recognizing that community labour could be used for semi-skilled work such as block making, the Project conducted information sessions in communities and engaged the interest of the communities in participating in construction activities. Once interest was generated, the Project provided both formal and on-the-job training to both men and women). Interviews with the school principals and local stakeholders during ICR team visit in the field showed that between 100 and 300 women were involved in construction works in each school. Number of men involved varies between

200 and 1000 per school for the duration of the construction works. This proved very effective.

7 On-the-job training and mentoring provided by the project appears to have augmented the project management knowledge of the Department of Education staff responsible for infrastructure development and has been very much appreciated. Specifically the MOE's FAU (former PIU) appears to have increased and has sustainable capacity to undertake procurement activity in future. This was demonstrated during the procurement and logistics activities for the EU-funded Edutrain project or the implementation of VESAP.

8 Designs did not incorporate many common practices that would have resulted in lower lifecycle costs. For instance, door hardware is very light, where it should be heavy duty; roofs unnecessarily incorporate fascia boards, which are high maintenance items; external walls have been painted, requiring repainting. In one case, an old dormitory design was reused, incorporating barge boards that extended beyond the roof sheathing, leading to visible rot on existing buildings.

9 Contractor flexibility helped increase effectiveness:

- Capacity to make adjustments to design specifications and building targets in some schools. This measure accommodated changes in response to specific conditions at each site and became important when the schools needed changed during the time between design and the start of construction. This insured that energy was spent on what was needed, rather than outdated scope items.
- At the request of the principals and from the savings made by each school additional work was provided in all five schools.

10 Although school principals and PEOs felt that the project met important school needs, they did not feel that they were adequately heard on some issues.⁶ The involvement of the principals in the PCC did not appear to provide them with adequate voice. This may be due to the fact that the project was scope-driven (i.e. MC was given a list of things to do) rather than budget-driven (i.e. a fixed budget, a prioritization of works, and the instruction to work with the Principal and PEO to fill out the detail. In future, the budget-driven approach would provide greater flexibility to respond to the changing needs of schools, and ongoing discovery of problems.

C Efficiency

1 In general, management and delivery of the VSSEP2 was well regarded by the MoE, schools and communities. The program was inclusive and in general responsive to schools needs. The community approach provided a sound structure for the provision of infrastructure works. The outputs, capacity building and contribution to MoE objectives were highly valued by all stakeholders

2 VSSEP2 was also well regarded by other donors. The VSSEP2 contracting model was used in EDUTRAIN, and could be used in NZAID similar type of infrastructure assistance.

6 Although principals and PEOs met were not Principals and PEOs at the time of the project, they were often deputy principals and PEOs, and were thus familiar with the project.

3 The VSSEP2 partnership and small contractor contracting model for infrastructure works. delivered the following advantages:

- reduced cost
- capacity building and training of villages
- increased engagement of communities with school, and vice versa

4 The project initiated in a major shift in cost reduction by:

- Using AVIs as site supervisors; they were mobilised early in the project and have been responsible for supervising all construction works, developing training strategies, and negotiating contracts and agreements with communities and small contractors. The AVIs provided a low cost management inputs that the schools saw as critical to the success of the project.
- Negotiation with communities during design for agreement to supply sand, limestone and water from locally available sources, donated under a Community Resource Agreement. The villages were rewarded with (a) training, and (b) labour contracts. They also saw the benefits in a larger school, which allowed their children to live at home, thus saving on boarding fees.
- In all schools, village labour inputs were negotiated for under lump sum group contracts (piecework.) Such contracts delivered results at a low, controlled, and predictable cost.
- Employment mainly of local small-scale local contractors to undertake work, at prices lower than the larger, Vila-based contractors.
- Students from Pentecost and Aore had the opportunity to participate in on-the-job training in furniture construction.

5 Skilled workers and trainers were rotated among sites. Experienced block makers from one island, Tafea, undertook training of community groups in Aore. This model was also used to train women's groups in painting across the islands. This rotation created efficiencies through knowledge sharing.

6 Local Task Force represented the local community and the school assisted the Site Supervisor in managing community inputs on-site and provided assistance with payment agreements, recruitment, dismissal and dispute resolution. The mechanism was well regarded by local stakeholders involved, and help resolve stop-pages and mediate conflicts and demands.

7 Data from the Managing Contractor shows that there are substantial benefits to the local economy by expanding opportunities for employment of local contractors and groups. It is estimated that 95% of reimbursable costs (costs predominantly for construction materials and labour) were spent in-country, having been sourced from local suppliers. This represented 70% of the budget overall.

D Impact

1 Impacts identified in contractor Completion Reports and verified by stakeholder consultations include positive impacts on:

- village livelihoods
- village skills development
- village career and business advancement
- children schooled closer to home
- strengthened relationships between schools and communities
- better housing in the villages
- more space for education and boarding in the schools
- a raised status and participation for women in construction, and
- increased FAU experience in community-based school construction.

Although the M&E system was not set up to quantify these impacts, some estimates are including in the following detailed descriptions.

2 There were some negative impacts:

- schools have now more to maintain, without an increased capacity to do so
- some conflicts were generated by the project: one volunteer lacked inter-cultural skills, and came into conflict with both school and village; in another case, use of water for construction exacerbated underlying tensions about water supply. These conflicts were probably not avoidable, and within the normal range of problems encountered by any project. The MC managed both well.
- The FAU impact was as designed, rather than what the FAU should be (and is now intended to be, given its change of name.) This was outside the scope of the project, but could have been considered during the design stage, if the project design had been given a slightly broader scope.

3 From the perspective of villagers, the project has provided a much needed job and a source of income for the duration of the construction works and has been used to support school fees, purchase household items and food.

4 Between 200 and 1000 men were employed by each school during the life of the project. If the man was the main household head then another four people have benefited from his work. This means that between 800 and 4000 people from each school community have benefited from employment through the project.

5 In some schools women established weekly markets during project implementation. These markets are still going on now, with about 10 women coming to school every day from neighbouring villages and selling on average 2000 to 5000 Vatu per day in Ranwadi or Epi or Rensarie.

6 While it was difficult by the AMC to forecast the extent to which there would be future employment opportunities for local contractors and community groups after VSSEP2, the ICR team has gained anecdotal evidence that this has actually happened: villagers interviewed cited a range of opportunities where they have uses these skills:

- Villagers have acquired skills that they further used either in the village in building houses or in other formal works, including work for the school, and earned more income for their families since the completion of VSSEP2. In

Rensarie, for example, the school is currently using VSSEP2 villagers in fencing the school.

- There is also anecdotal evidence that it is being used to invest in small business opportunities such as retail shops.

7 Small local contractors have also been positively affected by the program. They earned respect and trust from the community, schools and other government agencies of their capability to undertake infrastructure work. Each small contractor earned on average 200,000-400,000 Vatu during the project and employed five to six people. Since then their work load has increased. Two subcontractors that did work in Tanna and Epi are currently employed by MoE to do construction work: they employ now ten people on average, and contract values have increased to 500k to 1m Vatu per job.

8 One local small contractor used on Rensari school, has been involved in a number of new and high value contracts since VSSEP completion. He built Lakatoru secondary school, funded by MoE, contract values of up to 10 million Vatu. He also worked on other donor-funded projects: Malampa fish market in 2008 funded by JICA. He continues using VSSEP2 workers for these works.

9 Many people involved in VSSEP have never engaged in the education system, and certainly for the women painters, there was a strong sense of empowerment gained through their ability to learn new skills and earn an income. These intangible benefits can change the way people view the future and their preparedness to engage in new ways of doing things

10 Businesses in the communities have also benefited from the project: as money have been spent in the community, by VSSEP2 staff and workers on food, accommodation, and other items. Some of the business have even expanded and during VSSEP2 and for example in Ranwadi it did open a restaurant, and more recently after VSSEP2 completion diversified to meet more students request on providing mobile phones, money transfer with Western Union. Interviewees reported that each student spend up to Vt500 per week on mobile phone costs.

11 Despite being a construction project VSSEP2, has challenged gender stereotypes through providing opportunities for women's employment as painters. Women interviewed by ICR team have stated that they would like the same opportunities as men across all construction jobs, indicating that the project opened opportunities for women to benefit from income earning and training opportunities.

E Sustainability

1 Project use of local contractors and village work groups has resulted in identification, use and skills upgrading of a significant group of locally skilled tradesmen on each of the islands, many of whom have continued to obtain further contract work after VSSEP2. This increase in capacity is sustainable, though steps should be taken to ensure that this capacity continues to be used.

2 Community groups (women group or youth groups) earned money during the project and are using the money to sustain their activities. Examples from Rensarie:

- A women's group that is using the money to build a Women's Centre that will be used as meeting place, guest house, or training facility that can be rented out to earn money;

- A youth group that sent this year 30 youths to participate in an annual youth Annual conference and benefited from training and social networking.

3 Although the approach adopted by the project appeared to have encouraged linkages between the school and the local community and to have improved the technical capacity of school maintenance staff, this capacity has not been sustained. Only one school had an SMO in place. Limited budget allocated to school maintenance will continue to limit future maintenance and refurbishment efforts. Each of the schools visited had in 2008 a maintenance budget in place that varies between 17 to 29% of the total budget, however, but principals report that this allocation is rarely, if ever, spent on maintenance works; exception is Ranwadi and Aore. Furthermore:

- either this budget may still be inadequate, or
- inadequacy of proper maintenance planning and systems may mean that the budget is inefficiently spent (e.g. on fixing a generator that has broken down because of poor preventive maintenance.)

4 While there are substantial benefits resulting from increased school amenity and the income earned by families in the area, the sustainability of the quality of education and equitable access to education remain. Increasing the number of buildings were not sufficient to achieve the project's stated aim of expanding access to senior secondary education. Though it was not the mandate of VSSEP2 to provide additional teachers who must be suitably qualified, and learning materials are required. Principals have raised again their concern about the issue of qualified teacher shortages and lack of textbooks and teaching materials for senior secondary classes. Issue has been tackled by the project but no definition of the Senior Secondary curriculum made it difficult to provide the right material. Some textbooks have been provided by the project, but not in sufficient quantity or in the subject most taught by the schools.

5 From a wider perspective, the rationale for expanding senior secondary schooling depends on improving quality at lower levels of the system. Increasing numbers at the higher level will have little value if the students have not been adequately prepared for more advanced studies. The problem with year 7 and 8 students that are not being properly prepared due to lack of qualified teachers or appropriate teaching materials to enter the secondary level was raised during ICR team visits. However these are key priorities that will be addressed now by VESAP and Australia Vanuatu Partnership for Development⁷.

6 When students finish secondary education, they compete together with university graduates for a very limited number of formal sector jobs that are created in the Vanuatu economy each year. With the economy producing less than 700 new wage jobs each year and the annual output from the education formal system approaching 3,500, opportunities for school leavers to access jobs in formal economy are meagre. The World Bank's projection of formal sector employment in the next couple of years in Vanuatu is not so optimistic. It shows that the situation is not getting better, with only 10% increase formal sector employment by 2015. With a secondary school system that focuses mainly of general education with only few options for technical education, the majority of those leaving school are poorly equipped to compete for scarce jobs in knowledge and marketable skills. Some of the schools visited

7 Australia Vanuatu Partnership for Development was signed on May the 27th

offer some technical subjects such as Technology, Agriculture, Food technology, Woodworks as compulsory for the junior or optional for senior education. However these subjects are few, and quite often do not mirror the demands of the labour market. It was not expected that these issues to be addressed by VSSEP2, however they have been observed by the ICR team and concerns have been raised by a number of stakeholders consulted.

7 Most out-of-school youth who did not enter the university have only two options: to return to their villages and a subsistence existence, or to travel to the two towns Port Vila and Luganville looking for work in the informal sector. However, work in urban areas either as an employee or as the operator of a micro-business requires at least some basic vocational and entrepreneurial skills, which they do not have. Therefore school leavers return to their home communities where they are largely employed in subsistence agriculture and fishing. The need for the MoE to offer some alternative pathways to students during secondary education becomes crucial. Investment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to stimulate domestic or overseas employment is, however, very low at around 0.7 percent of the Government budget. AusAID has been funding a program to strengthen TVET sector since 2005.⁸ Its second phase aims to address most of these issues with a clear focus on providing training that responds to labour market demand that will have a result in increased employment and income generation activities in two Vanuatu provinces: Sanma and Malapma.

8 Though not from a public school, some evidence of the need to and benefit of developing trade skills was gathered in Aore, with the newly established Trade School Lister Adventist Institute. Interviews with the students showed that even though only 15 to 18 years of age they had clear objectives and pathways: they would like to pursue a career in furniture making or construction industry in order to improve the standard of living for themselves and their families. To be better off than their brothers and sisters who were primary or secondary school graduates and were staying at home in the village doing gardening.

9 The expansion of basic education to include years 7 and 8 is proceeding despite a number of unresolved issues such as curriculum reform and teacher training. These reforms, if not dealt with properly, could impact on enrolments in secondary education.

10 The community partnership process is currently being used by Public Works Department in building roads in Epi, and will further be used in VTSSP (AusAID funded program). NZAID is also interested in using the approach in its infrastructure project that are either in education, health or other sectors. The community partnership model is an important and sustainable addition to the range of modalities available to the MoE.

F Gender Equality

1 The community based approach offered the possibility for men and women in the villages to equally participate in project activities. Anecdotal evidence showed that women groups were actively involved in four out of five VSSEP2 schools, in the following activities:

8 Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening Program: 2005-2012

- painting
- site clean up
- excavating sand and karanas (limestone)
- furniture

It seems that between 100 and 300 women were involved in each school. Number of men involved varies between 200 and 1000. Aore Adventist Academy did not involve any women in its construction activities, perhaps because their work crews had to travel long distances, and camp on site.

2 VSSEP2 has challenged gender stereotypes through providing opportunities for women's employment in construction, a category of work traditional restricted to men. Women on Tanna and Epi Islands have stated that they would like the same opportunities as men across all construction jobs, indicating that the project could potentially do more to open opportunities for women to benefit from income earning and training opportunities. However, there was no sign that VSSEP2 has increased the role of women in decision-making.

3 One of the objectives of VSSEP2 was to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education to manage the planning, construction management and quality control of educational infrastructure development. Due to the nature of the work in VSSEP the staff in PIU was male, with one exception: the Finance and Administration Manager. Staff has been trained on the job and benefited from being actively involved in project activities and working with the MC team. The Finance Manager has further developed her skills and since then has moved to a more senior position.

4 The project design assumed that one outcome of VSSEP2 would be an increase in number of girls entering secondary education. Evidence from the 2004-2009 enrolments showed that some increase in numbers has occurred in a number of schools, but this varies from one year to another. If, however, we look for consistent increase in percentage of girls in senior secondary for the period, then this did not occur in any of the schools. Only one school, Rawandi, had consistent increase for the period, except for 2006. For the other four, it varies: increases some years, decreasing others. Overall in Vanuatu senior secondary education the percentage of girls remained constant at about 48% during the same period. (Annex A5)

5 The education of children and youth with disabilities is a challenge facing Vanuatu. Interviewees reported no students with mobility disabilities are enrolled in the five VSSEP2 schools visited by the ICR team. The team's visits to the premises and discussions held with stakeholders showed that barriers to inclusion of youth with special needs in education and training are: lack of policy, lack of teachers trained in special needs education, physical constraints of buildings, as well as attitudes. MOE is currently developing an inclusive education policy.

G Monitoring and Evaluation

1 The M&E system for the project before current AusAID standards for M&E were in place.

2 The main aim of VSSEP2 was to expand secondary education through the provision of 350 additional senior secondary places in five schools in Vanuatu. The project was designed as an infrastructure project, implemented by a construction

company, and did not have M&E as a main focus in the design.. Therefore the design of the VSSEP2 project (its Logframe with its objectives and assigned indicators) focused mainly on process and activities. The M&E system put in place by the Managing Contractor followed the same system. As a result the M&E Plan and the subsequent reports were only based on and reported about how the VSSEP2 carried out its main tasks (process) or/and how it achieved its objectives. The Managing contractor did this well, but the original LOGFRAME was deficient. (See Annex A7: M&E Plan).

3 This type of reporting often produces more positive findings than evaluations based on impacts and cost-effectiveness. Because of the lack of focus of the design and then M&E Plan on outcomes, impacts and cost effectiveness, many results at this level for VSSEP have not been captured in MC reports. The ICR team identified through interviewing project stakeholders some anecdotal evidence of project outcome and impact, such as income generated for villagers, jobs created for men and women, improvement in the community livelihoods, changes in behaviour and well-being for students, men and women as a result of the project. Examples have been provided in the Effectiveness, Efficiency and Impact sections. However, a thorough analysis could not be done within the limited resources of the ICR.

4 Reporting on cross cutting issues did not take place and were not included in the M&E system for VSSEP2: issues such as how and how many men and women were involved in the project, and the impact of the project on the environment were not covered in MC's reports.

H Analysis and Learning

Analysis and Learning in the Design

1 The original project design appears to have been heavily weighted to construction process, an area in which the project was very successful. However, there was insufficient learning from previous and other projects on the need for complete schools, and the design did not adequately analyse:

- education requirements
- the maintenance issue
- M&E on outcomes, rather than process
- the need of MOE for a facilities management function rather than a project implementation function
- possible problems with village political structures

2 The project appears to be underscoped and underbudgeted. Indicators include:

- older classrooms left with rusting roofs
- classrooms left without equipment
- libraries without books
- one library and some classrooms without cyclone shutters
- repairs of water supply incomplete.

This is always a risk because (a) building condition and costs may change between design and implementation, and (b) design budgets do not allow for extensive investigation on sites. Therefore, infrastructure designs should avoid working to detailed scope lists.

In future projects designs instead specify that application of funds be prioritised in this order:

1. any work critical to student health, and especially water and sanitation
2. any work critical to safety, such as cyclone-proofing and electrical systems
3. essential repairs necessary to existing buildings to extend their life: e.g. re-roofing
4. new buildings with completeness ready for teaching (including furniture, equipment, books) to take priority over quantity of new buildings.

Analysis during Implementation

3 During implementation the MC showed excellent analytical work in:

- setting up processes for mobilizing villages and local contractors
- setting up training processes, including the transfer of skills from trained school communities to untrained school communities
- handling the complex procurement and logistics required for these remote sites.

Learning

4 VSSEP1 opened the door to small scale contractors on Efate by (a) breaking down the work into smaller packages, (b) simplifying the bidding, (c) generating awareness of the new progress, (d) assisting contractor cashflow by “free issue” of materials, and (e) providing technical assistance as well as inspection. VSSEP2 incorporate all of these lessons, and significantly extended the program by (a) opening the door to community participation, (b) mobilising community goodwill in exchange for work opportunities and training, (c) using volunteer resources as technical assistance on site.

5 However, building design did not appear to incorporate many of the lessons of VSSEP1 aimed at reducing maintenance, such as (a) elimination of fascias, (b) use of white Colorbond for ceilings, and (c) limit painting of exteriors, (d) overhangs to protect timber. Certain aspects of the new buildings have not been designed to be robust, and some have failed already. Examples include fixing of light switches, the use of domestic locksets on classroom doors, and absence of doorstops to prevent door furniture hitting walls, and chairs too light to withstand student handling. In one case, new dormitories were built to the same design as old dormitories—built thirty years earlier—which had design flaws causing them to fail.

6 In summary, most of the analytic weaknesses were during the design phase, and the analytic strengths during implementation. Learning from earlier work during implementation was generally strong, except in the area of building design.

IV Evaluation Criteria Ratings

Evaluation Criteria	Rating (1-6)
Relevance	5
Effectiveness	5
Efficiency	6
Sustainability	4
Gender Equality	4
Monitoring & Evaluation	3 ⁹
Analysis & Learning	4

Rating scale:

Satisfactory		Less than satisfactory	
6	Very high quality	3	Less than adequate quality
5	Good quality	2	Poor quality
4	Adequate quality	1	Very poor quality

V Conclusion and Recommendations

1 VSSEP2 is a successful and path-breaking project, which earns high praise from its direct beneficiaries: the schools and local communities. Within the limits of the design, the Project achieved its core objectives, and forge important innovations, the most significant of which is the Community Partnerships. This core success is somewhat shadowed by weaknesses around the construction process, including weaknesses in: (a) building design, (b) maintenance process, (c) handover, and (d) completeness of scope.

2 The VSSEP2 design had a number of limitations that influenced project performance and effectiveness. Higher-level goals and objectives were not clearly monitored, the responsibility for project monitoring and evaluation was not clearly specified, and there was no mechanism for tracking social and impact benefits during project implementation.

The following ideas might be applied to future project planning:

3 *Promotion of Community Partnerships:* The Community Partnership model established by the VSSEP2 has led to enormous cost efficiencies, and collateral community development benefits. Apart from direct benefits to communities by way of payment and skilling and significant improvements to peoples life style one clear benefit was that the increased capacities of schools and expansion of school populations has resulted in economic benefit to the local community. More spending has occurred and more businesses have sprung up. Small businesses are continuing to prosper and spring up as more teachers and students live in the area.

9 The design was the cause of poor M&E

The training and up-skilling carried out by the project has been outstanding and praised by the communities. In some areas there has been an attempt by the project to integrate the project with other training providers such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Rural Training Centres. This has been a positive move for future consideration and should be further investigated and worked on even if they have to involve Vanuatu National Training Council (VNTC) for possible accreditation as service providers. This is in particular where capable local contractors wish to pursue professional careers as licensed contractors.

This methodology is suitable for a wide range of development activities, and could be actively promoted among donors and other Government of Vanuatu departments.

4 *Community-Based Contracting (CBC):* CBC is well-established methodology for rural schools, pioneered by the World Bank, in which the school community itself is contracted to undertake construction, using a tranced lump sum grant, and supported with designs, training, TA, and inspections. An example is the East Timor Emergency School Readiness Project. It seems that the next logical step in the progress from the original large-contractor-built method, through VSSEP1 and VSSEP2, is to move to CBC. The advantages of CBC are (a) enhanced school planning and management capacity, (b) greater ownership and understanding of scope and budget, (c) greater ownership, accountability and sustainability, (d) potentially even lower cost, and (e) ease of future extension (because this would then require only funds, TA and inspections), and (f) stronger relationships between schools and urban suppliers.

The primary difference between CBC and the current Community Partnerships approach, is that:

- Under Community Partnerships, the community leadership provides a support role to the MC.
- Under CBC, the community itself becomes contractor, supported by TA, QA, finance and logistics from the MC.

CBC involves a further investment of responsibility in the school community, and would have to be trialled before being rolled out widely. Once trialled, it is more appropriate for rural and remote areas, rather than for urban schools near the centre.

5 *Asset Management and Maintenance:* Asset Management and Maintenance is a complex process, different in scope and nature from a construction process. As has often been the case, this project attempts to add sustainable maintenance to a construction process. Though there is a role for maintenance capacity building within a construction process, this is not enough to guarantee maintenance. Suggest instead that:

- a separate activity be constituted in future, to look solely at maintenance at a systemic level, including matters of skill level, distance, roles of different government levels, robustness and funding.
- donors consider ongoing maintenance as a legitimate target for funding
- all parties look at Aore as a case study of a school run as a rural enterprise, with three streams of income contributing to the budget: parent contributions; government contributions; school enterprise contributions.

At very least, such a system would require three levels:

- Self-reliant schools that can do most of the maintenance themselves. It's not possible for a small central Ministry to maintain 500 schools scattered throughout an archipelago.
- Provincial Maintenance Officers at each province with the capacity to support schools with training and technical advice.¹⁰
- A Facility Management Unit at the MoE, charged with the oversight of the whole system, and not pulled into projects.

The role of the FMU cannot be—realistically—to undertake maintenance on a centralised basis. Rather, the role of the FMU needs to be to control and coordinate:

- Designs for new construction, to minimise life cycle costs
- Provide budget advice, to match the asset pool
- Prioritised maintenance strategy, to match available resources
- Manuals, training and support to schools, to improve their capacity to maintain their own assets, with a focus on:
 - effective ongoing community partnerships
 - correct prioritisation
 - preventive maintenance, especially of high cost and vulnerable items such as generators
- Commissioning of major repair work, beyond the scope of school management
- Identification of systemic weaknesses, and development of new strategy and policy proposals

Maintenance is a school management issue. In order to have maintained schools, schools need to have personnel trained in practical managements of projects and fundraising as well as academic curriculum. They must be trained to have an 'eye' for maintenance. This is a learned skill, and should not be assumed as a given.

6 *Maintenance as a Component:* Rather than incorporate maintenance training into construction training, better to set up maintenance as a separate project component, and set up the maintenance team at the inception of the project, with a separate budget, permanent tools and facilities, and a brief to undertake all maintenance and repairs of existing buildings over the life of the project. By project end, this team would be trained and fully equipped to do maintenance, ready for ongoing funding.

7 *Facilities and Assets Unit:* In a comparable Unit in most countries, this Unit would focus on:

- asset planning to meet the needs of the sector
- asset management and maintenance
- maintenance of standards for new facilities, including both design standards and construction standards
- contracting out of building design and project management
- continuous improvement of all systems

¹⁰ This is being covered under the VESAP Transition Plan.

- monitoring and evaluation.

The FAU might be re-positioned into such a role. Had the FAU been “keeper of the standards”, one limitation of VSSEP2—the re-use in one case of 30-year-old, flawed dormitory designs, would not have occurred.

Such a repositioning would require a broad scope. There is currently no maintenance role apart from reactionary maintenance. There is no budget for maintenance. The life of this unit is very much dependant on the project funding for buildings. Due to the magnitude of building projects with MOE it appears that the PIU will continue to survive but issues of management and role change have surfaced as to whether they can continue to provide direct technical input into these projects or act as a facilitator to contracting services to private contractors including the up-skilled community.

The first step in such repositioning is to create a clear new role definition for the FMU, based on working models in other countries. (The FMU of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, developed with assistance from AusAID, may provide helpful lessons.) Definition of roles of the PMOs and schools should follow. This overall organisational design can be matched against existing capacity, and a transition plan created, focusing early investment on creating early wins, and a positive cultur of change to carry through a multi-year process.

8 Planning for Complete Schools: Additional classrooms and dormitories by themselves do not allow for education expansion. Future projects should aim for complete schools, including:

- new buildings
- repair of all existing buildings
- repair and upgrading of all services: water, sanitation and power
- commitment by the MoE to place appropriately trained teachers.
- In this project, both members of the design team were engineers, and the top three tiers of the implementation company were construction professionals. This biased the design and implementation towards built works. A complete school with more sustainable outcomes for all parties requires a more comprehensive approach, including not just construction process. Therefore, future efforts should have specialist inputs on sustainable building design, community development, facilities management, education planning, and M&E.

9 Long Term School Leadership: There seems to be a high turnover of school leadership, with none of the Principals at the time that we interviewed them being Principal during the project. It’s difficult to develop sustainable schools, with a high turnover in leadership. The impact of this turnover, and ways of ameliorating the impact, might be further investigated.

10 Sustainable Rural Schools: Ministry of Education Budget 90% is spent on salaries. There is little left for other priorities which have implications for maintenance of schools. At the same time school budgets are supplemented by the MOE which is often disbursed late and in the light of large outstanding school fees i.e. Tafea 3.7m for 2008 this leaves schools struggling to meet very basic requirements to provide for boarders much less maintenance. Schools would rather spend on food than painting. The fact that all schools are boarding placing an enormous burden of daily rationing for food, fuel, medical and other basic supplies.

Of the schools visited, Aore appeared the most sustainable. This for two reasons: (a) it supplemented parent and Government income with rural production and services income, and (b) school management has a comprehensive vision for the institution which included not only classroom instruction, but the involvement of students in rural production and maintenance of the school, as part of a comprehensive education spanning academics, practical skills, and work ethic. Aore might usefully be studied to create programs and components for more sustainable rural schools, such as:

- rural management skills for principals and staff
- rural enterprises to bolster school budgets
- a balance of academic and practical activities for students
- a comprehensive “business plan” for each school.

This model recognises that school education comprises not just formal curriculum, but the entire school milieu as an aspect of the way that students are socialised into adult life.

In the light of growing costs and supply of fuel alternative sources of energy have been trialled and implemented by the project as a positive initiative however it remains to be seen whether these initiatives are sustainable and robust. In particular for schools such alternative sources really needs to be pursued such as hydro power, thermal energy, wind turbines as well as solar as a lot of the schools are positioned near to flowing rivers. If maintainable energy sources can be achieved to run computers then the obvious connection to online courses and materials to ameliorate the shortage of texts needs to be further explored.

11 Procurement Harmonization: The success of the community partnerships lay in part in the flexibility given the MC to set up procurement and disbursement systems appropriate to village engagement. The FIU reports that this is much more difficult when operating under GoV systems, than it was under VSSEP2. It would be prudent to check that the GoV systems do allow for Community Partnerships, and provisions are made where they are not. Community arrangements need to be simple, transparent, and fast.

Subcontracting to unlicensed builders was a common practice in this context however the overwhelming success rate seems due to adequate supervision and seems not to have been an issue. Issues may arise however on technicalities based on Vanuatu labour laws. (e.g. VNPF, Workers Comp Insurance etc)

12 Stronger engagement of communities with schools: Engagement of communities with schools have lead to benefits on both sides: strengthening of village capacity to improve rural life, increases in earning power, and lower cost school buildings.

This engagement might be extended to tackle another problem: the imbalance between investment in access and investment in quality. This imbalance exists primarily because the ultimate stakeholders—the voting citizenry—understand education access more than they understand education quality. Access is tangible; quality is more difficult to perceive. This is particular true if there is disjunct between classroom learning and the daily life of the citizens.

The US program “New Designs for the Comprehensive High School” may offer some useful suggestions. It is described in a conference presentation attached as Annex A6. It describes how to connect schools to stakeholder outcomes. It also shows that in the 21st Century, high schools need to be connected to real world institutions, and draw their problems from them, so that children be prepared to be 21st Century

workers, capable of working in teams to tackle complex, cross-disciplinary problems to which the solution is not known.

It's possible that lessons from this work could help make a stronger connection between high schools and their surrounding communities, in which classroom work applied theoretical knowledge to real-world village problems of agricultural production, conflict mediation, political decision-making, mechanics of building, and so forth, rather than to textbook problems which have limited relevance and benefits to parents.