

## Evaluation: Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education Vanuatu MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

### Investment Summary

Investment Name	Vanuatu Education Support program (VESP)
AidWorks reference	Investment INK372; Activity 12B301; Agreement 69656 (DFA)
Original dates (DFA):	2 June 2014 to 30 June 2017
Amended dates (DFA):	2 June 2014 to 31 January 2019 (amendment signed on 23 June 2017)
Agreement value (DFA):	A\$8,152,772 (incl. A\$2,217,896 from New Zealand Government) Of this, A\$1.8 million is for the Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education component
Implementing partner:	World Vision Vanuatu (WVV)
Other key partners:	Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)
Country/Region:	Vanuatu
Primary sector:	Education
Program outcomes:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improved quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in pilot communities;</li> <li>2. Increased support for ECCE in pilot communities;</li> <li>3. Innovations to improve cost-effectiveness piloted and evaluated; and</li> <li>4. Strengthened MoET support to the national delivery of ECCE.</li> </ol>

### Activity summary

In 2012, the Government of Vanuatu (GoV) and development partners (Australia and New Zealand) agreed to a five-year Vanuatu Education Support Program (VESP) to support a greater emphasis on early learning. ECCE is one of five components of VESP, with funding provided directly to MoET through a Direct Funding Arrangement (DFA). As part of this, MoET contracted an implementing partner (World Vision Vanuatu) to implement a pilot program, Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education (SECCE).

### Evaluation Summary

An evaluation of the program took place in 2016. The key objective of the evaluation was to “identify lessons from the pilot that can inform and improve the cost-effectiveness of subsequent government support to kindergartens on a national scale.” The questions were organised under four categories:

1. Relevance: To what extent is the program relevant to the Vanuatu education context?
2. Effectiveness: To what extent has the program contributed to the improvement of early childhood education delivery in the targeted communities?
3. Efficiency: Has implementation of the program made effective use of time and resources to achieve the outcomes?
4. Sustainability: Are identified program benefits sustainable beyond the period of the program?

Data collection consisted of document analysis, structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations. A sample of 32 kindergartens were visited across three provinces.

**The review team consisted of:**

- Jenny James, ECCE National Coordinator, MoET (team leader)
- Serah Vurobaravu, ECCE Curriculum and Program officer, MoET
- Barbara Thornton, Independent Education Specialist (lead consultant)
- Jeffrey Tari, M&E officer, MoET
- Alan Swan, Curriculum Adviser, VESP
- Ufemia Camaitoga, Pacific ECCE specialist
- Christelle Thieffry, Senior Program Manager, Australian High Commission
- Belynda McNaughton, Assistant Director, Education Section, DFAT
- Minnie Takaro, Program Manager, New Zealand High Commission

Site visits on Efate took place during the week of 1 August 2016. Field trips to Malampa and Torba provinces took place between 8 – 12 August 2016. The evaluation was completed in September 2016.

**Key messages from the evaluation**

**Relevance** of the program was less than adequate with a lack of a shared vision of the key objectives of the program. The Ministry is now reviewing the policy and developing a five-year costed action plan, which will provide clarification in this area, so that both the Ministry and stakeholders are clear on future plans, strategies and actions. It is important for the government to share its broader strategic goals with implementing partners and service providers, but also for the implementing partners to make continual efforts to ensure that the program is aligned with the government’s strategic goals and sub-sector objectives.

**Effectiveness** of the program was found to be adequate. There was a marked improvement of the quality of ECCE in pilot communities (Outcome 1), which could be seen by the improvement in school readiness of children transitioning to Year 1, as well as in the resourcing of the kindergartens.

There was also increased support for ECCE in pilot communities (Outcome 2), with community involvement a key success factor for the program. Parents understood the importance of kindergarten and were able to articulate practical ways they could help their children at home.

Innovation through “alternative kindergartens” (Outcome 3), was found to be inadequate. Three “alternative kindergartens” were implemented, however, these were so similar in approach to the regular kindergartens that they could not really be viewed as alternatives. A higher level of technical input from an ECCE specialist advisor could have generated more innovative options.

**Efficiency** of the program was inadequate largely due to the very slow start, the changeover of staff and the initial difficulty in recruiting an adequately skilled Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. The lack of expertise in ECCE was also a drawback to this aspect of the program.

A lesson learned for MoET is the importance of ensuring that the program is seen as a MoET program, rather than a World Vision Vanuatu (WVV) project. Criteria stipulating branding should have been agreed at the initial stages so that key documentation did not go out to schools and communities bearing only the World Vision logo.

**Sustainability** of the program was mixed. Community involvement was particularly good and school readiness had improved. Although teamwork was viewed as essential to the SECCE program, some of the WVV field staff were working in isolation from the Provincial Education Officers and Provincial Coordinators. The review noted that the lack of an exit plan is a concern and MoET will need to take action to make sure that some of the good work done by WVV can be sustained.

A common thread in the responses from participants was “MoET leaders seem to value ECCE with their words but not with their actions”. As a priority, the evaluation noted that MoET will need to ensure that

the ECCE Unit is fully staffed and that Provincial Coordinators are given the means to travel to carry out their roles.

## Overall response to the evaluation

DFAT acknowledges the impact of the pilot program at the kindergarten and community levels and agrees with the need to strengthen MoET commitment to this sub-sector and to develop a multiyear strategy.

DFAT agrees that MoET and WVV have to work on a transition/exit strategy together and that the ECCE teams in the provinces will need to be trained to use the well-developed tools.

## Response to specific recommendations

***Recommendation 1:*** urgent decision needed on contract extension.

DFAT response: Agree

The evaluation team recommended an extension from six to 12 months. MoET and WVV have agreed to a six month extension.

Note, it is important to have an exit strategy from the program to retain the gains made. During the transition period, DFAT will continue to encourage WVV and MoET staff to work together with communities to emphasise the ongoing importance of ECCE. (Signed on 30 January 2017 to extend the contract to 31 July 2017.)

***Recommendation 2:*** urgent commitment from MoET to the ECCE sub-sector.

DFAT response: Agree

ECCE is the foundation for education, and the Minister of Education and Training has repeatedly mentioned that ECCE is not a sub-sector, but the stepping-stone to education. Budget commitment is still to be confirmed which is a concern: DFAT will advocate for a greater MoET commitment to ECCE through Steering Committee meetings and regular dialogue.

***Recommendation 3:*** the VESP Steering Committee pay closer attention to issues of quality so that the next administration of the tool is properly reported on.

DFAT response: Agree

The quality of reporting and performance is the responsibility of the Directorate of Education Services and the ECCE Unit, who hold the contract with WVV. DFAT will raise issues of quality at Steering Committee meetings, and will offer support and advice to MoET in the implementation and monitoring of the program.

***Recommendation 4:*** during the transition period, World Vision provide full training on the tools piloted by World Vision so that all communities can reap the benefit.

DFAT response: Agree

This is the main activity planned for the extension period and work is well underway.

***Recommendation 5:*** alternative low-cost ECCE provision is investigated and piloted by MoET in 2017 as intended by the original design. Such alternative provision could include community mobilisation through women's church groups, home-based playgroups and alternative Kindys.

DFAT response: Agree

MoET may wish to consider working more closely with churches, which are implementing alternatives, and develop them with communities. DFAT will monitor progress through Steering Committee meetings and regular dialogue.

**Recommendation 6:** the weekly meetings between MoET and World Vision are discontinued and replaced with monthly meetings supplemented by more frequent meetings, as and when required.

**DFAT response:** Agree

Practical meetings with a record of actions are recommended. DFAT will continue to offer support to MoET in contract management.

**Recommendation 7:** governance arrangements and the responsibilities of all parties be clearly spelled out for the remainder of the program.

**DFAT response:** Agree

WV and the ECCE unit have clarified governance arrangements and responsibilities. DFAT will continue to monitor and provide support to MoET to manage the transition period.

**Recommendation 8:** World Vision engage an ECCE Specialist to provide technical advice and ensure that the pedagogic aspects of the program are built on sound educational practice.

**DFAT response:** Partly agree

As the contract extension between MoET and WV is only be for six months, a new ECCE specialist has been recruited through VESP to provide support to the ECCE Unit for a longer period of time.

**Recommendation 9:** MoET secure funds to ensure that Provincial Coordinators can take over the role previously carried out by SECCE Coordinators. The Minister has indicated that he views ECCE as a priority and that conditions will need to be attached to this.

**DFAT response:** Partly Agree

Through the support VESP is providing to the Human Resource unit, DFAT will assist MoET to develop appropriate Terms of Reference for these positions. A new ECCE specialist has also been recruited through VESP to assist in this task.

**Recommendation 10:** MoET fill the two vacant positions in the ECCE Unit as soon as possible.

**DFAT response:** Agree

Three positions have been advertised, including the National Coordinator role (following the retirement of the former National Coordinator). The Human Resource Unit will work closely with the ECCE Unit and the Directorate of Education Services to assist with the process, with support provided as required through VESP. DFAT will monitor progress through Steering Committee meetings and regular dialogue.

**Recommendation 11:** VESP to recruit an ECCE specialist to work with the ECCE unit in MoET to develop the 5-year strategy.

**DFAT response:** Agree

VESP has recruited an ECCE specialist with appropriate experience to support MoET to develop the five-year strategy.