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**Formative Evaluation of a Project  
Increasing Access to TVET in the Pacific Region  
through the Use of Open and Distance Learning**

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## **Background**

This paper addresses some of the challenges of increasing access to education and training in small island states of the South Pacific.

The geographical factors are most significant. Many of the states comprise a large number of islands. They can make communication between the islands very difficult. In some states, the islands are separated by wide expanses of ocean. Some are small isolated islands, separated by a vast expanse of ocean from their neighbours. In PNG, the rugged terrain divides the people into small and relatively isolated communities.

Small island states like many countries in the Commonwealth are vulnerable because of a small economic base. This limits the capacity of their budget to provide access to the range of vocational education and training courses needed.

The demand for access to vocational training is increasing in these countries as the cohort of young people continues to grow. In many countries in the South Pacific, over 50% of the population are less than 25. This presents those governments with a socially explosive situation. Unless young people are equipped with the skills which will enable them to participate in the workforce – either as employed or self-employed, they may well become a socially destructive force.

There are a number of other factors which increases the challenge of providing education and training, such as political instability, inability to withstand environmental disasters and poorly developed infrastructure.

This project tests the validity of using a different approach to vocational education and training using flexible delivery supported by appropriate technology.

COL is working with a number of partners who have provided advice or direct financial support. These include the New Zealand Overseas Development Agency, the Department for International Development, UK, and UNESCO-UNEVOC.

## **Process**

The Commonwealth of Learning invited the Ministers of Education from the Pacific Island Commonwealth Member Countries to a meeting to discuss a regional proposal<sup>i</sup> to consider ways of improving relevance, equity, quality and access to skills development through open and distance learning utilising modern communications and information technology.

At that meeting, the Ministers recognised in a signed statement<sup>ii</sup> that:

1. Skills development is of prime importance to the economic and social development of the Pacific island states.
2. Flexible delivery of skills development programmes are necessary to provide the range of courses and to increase access and equity.
3. Learning materials for these courses should be adapted or developed and delivered through regional co-operation.

The Ministers agreed to recommend to their governments that they would:

1. Collaborate to improve relevance, equity and access to skills development through distance education and open learning in the region.
2. Cooperate in the adaptation and development of flexible and open learning materials.

Following this meeting, COL invited bureaucrats and senior managers of TVET institutions to a meeting in Brisbane in March, 2000. This meeting was also attended by representatives from both the UK office and from the South Pacific office of DFID.

That meeting focussed on the direction of the regional project and several strands of activities have resulted.

### **The Approach**

The project adopted a number of principles:

#### 1. Advocacy of ODL

That governments would need to be persuaded that distance learning was an approach worthy of consideration. In order to advocate the use of ODL, we had the support of Ministers of Education and of the Senior Managers in the ministries and institutions. We would need to demonstrate with some on the ground work, fairly quickly to maintain momentum.

#### 2. Local Ownership

The project must have a high level of ownership. It must be seen as a locally owned initiative. It would need to be championed within the counties and institutions.

#### 3. Improving Capacity

Development of Human Resource Capacity was of paramount importance. Unless, at the end of 3 years, there are sufficient people with skills on the ground, not much would have been achieved. It was also important to develop the skills of people at both the operative level and at the management and policy level. Unless both groups of people were present with skills and enthusiasm, any progress would be negated.

#### 4. A Regional Approach

The regional approach must be encouraged and supported. In this case, the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts. In developing learning materials, the value added as well as averaging the costs across the region make a regional approach to open and distance learning an important strategy.

#### 5. Recognition of Credit

A regional approach to learning materials leads directly into a consideration of a regional approach to qualifications. Recognition of credit and portability of qualifications – both in an academic sense and in a professional employment based sense are important considerations.

## **Activities**

This paper will now describe the major activities that were undertaken and evaluate their effectiveness.

### ***Leadership and Policy Development***

#### Pacific TVET Senior Managers Leadership Institutes

The Commonwealth of Learning is organising three annual Institutes in Wellington, NZ. The purpose of the institutes is to support senior TVET managers in Pacific Island nations to develop appropriate infrastructure support to facilitate more flexible delivery systems through their institutions. The first Institute was held October 15-19, 2001. Twenty three representatives from 12 countries attended: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The specific objectives of the first workshop included participants increasing their understanding of the resource implications of different choices in flexible learning delivery and being exposed to a range of flexible delivery options. They contributed to the development of a country and/or institutional plan to implement changes required to support open and distance learning and more mixed mode delivery in TVET.

Representatives agreed on the need for regional co-operation and set up the Pacific TVET Association to facilitate this. Mr. Perive Lene from Samoa, has also been elected by the group to represent them on the Board of the World Federation of Association of Colleges and Polytechnics. A web based discussion forum was set up to encourage progress reports and networking. This has been well supported.

The second Institute with the theme of Implementation will be held in Wellington, September 30-October 4, 2002.

### ***Skills in Developing and delivering ODL***

#### Adaptation of Supervisor Training Package to Distance

Tarawa Technical Institute (Kiribati) requested assistance to convert a face-to-face learning package for management training at supervisor level to a distance learning package for use in the outer islands. COL facilitated a one month attachment to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand for Mr. Taboa Tabanga from TTI to learn about ODL and begin the process of converting the learning material. An Instructional Designer was then sent to Kiribati for a month to help in skills development and provide assistance in completing the package. TTI now offers this course in dual mode. The package is available to other island nations wishing to utilise it.

#### Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT)

FIT is exploring ways of becoming a dual mode institution, delivering courses by distance education to the Pacific region. Dr. Sala Bakalevu, the Head of the Centre for Professional Development, obtained COL support for a month's attachment to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand in November 2001. Her report recommended that a COL study team visit FIT to advise on ways to achieve the development and delivery of distance learning courses.

The COL study team visited FIT April 28-May 2, 2002. There are about 15,000 students (including 142 regional students from other Pacific nations) studying at the campuses in Suva, Nadi, Ba and Labasa. The government grant has remained the same since 1998, but the number of equivalent full time students has risen 60% in that time. Hundreds of students are turned away each semester. FIT is looking at a number of ways to resolve the funding problems and increase technical and vocational learning opportunities for students in Fiji and the region. They are franchising a number of their programmes to secondary schools to teach and have had enquiries from Tuvalu to purchase these resources.

The study team suggested that a unit dedicated to distance learning be established to support distance learning design, development, production and dispatch. While the resource implications for this are worked out, ways to maintain staff enthusiasm and prepare them for the introduction of ODL could be achieved by enrolling staff in distance learning courses to study the principles of ODL, adult learning and instructional design.

#### Developing Open Learning Resources for Tourism

The COL Pacific TVET Committee identified a number of areas where they wished to work together to develop open and distance learning materials. High on the list was a set of basic resources to support the training of people entering employment in tourism for the first time. Many of these people have a low level of education so the materials needed to be designed to meet the needs of community groups and rural people. The resources must be capable of being easily translated from English to the local language and adapted to the needs of the community that will use them. The learning materials are to be developed at a level below the certificate level that is already taught in most countries.

A number of countries were interested in participating in this venture and the representatives from Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu volunteered to provide two people from each country to attend a workshop on the development of this material. The first workshop was held in Lower Hutt, Wellington from March 4-8, 2002. The workshop was designed to be as participative as possible, with a mixture of formal presentations and opportunities for teams to work on their material.

The following topics were identified:

- Introduction to Tourism
- Basic Hospitality for Tourism
- Basic Communication in Tourism
- Planning a Career in Tourism
- Setting up a Tourism Project

The group divided into 3 teams, with representatives from each country working with an instructional designer on a module. Learning outcomes were identified and the content, activities and assessment were planned. (Two modules are identified for future development). The form of the learning packages is based on the model of the *Learning about Small Business* package developed for adaptation in Pacific countries. There will be a set of teacher/mentor notes, which will contain the main content and teaching strategies. This will be supplemented with a student workbook, where the student records in simple form, their responses to activities or questions. The third part, the adaptation guide, will offer guidance to in-country institutions on how to adapt the material for local use.

A report on the workshop was presented to representatives of the COL Pacific TVET Committee in Melbourne March 23-24, 2002. The approach and material were endorsed and work has continued in-country with support from visiting Instructional Designers to complete the draft of the materials. The draft modules will be made available by the end of July to the Pacific TVET Committee members for their evaluation before work is done on final changes, editing, printing and distribution. Participating countries will then translate and adapt the material for use in their own cultures.

### ***Production of Course Materials***

#### Learning about Small Business

There is increasing concern within the Commonwealth that poverty and populations are increasing in small island countries and a perception that training to support entrepreneurial skills would be useful. An Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the Pacific and Caribbean met in Vancouver in August 28-30, 2000 to decide the shape of the learning materials. The group agreed that the purpose of the learning materials was to encourage small business at a local level in island nations, to help people appreciate their own skills and harness them in successful small enterprise. It was recognised that many of the people at the community level would have limited or no literacy and numeracy skills to understand the fundamentals of small business.

A contract was awarded to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand to develop the learning materials. The package that was developed consists of the following:

- Adaptation Guide for the Delivering Institution
- Tutor Pack
- Participant's Workbook
- CD Rom with all the material in both read only format and a form that can be downloaded and manipulated.

The package is base material intended to guide institutions to create their own versions, appropriate to their own needs, translated into their own languages. The Adaptation Guide explains what resources, such as audiotape interviews, videos, posters, charts and brochures should be amassed in order to teach each concept in each module of the Tutor Pack and Participant's Workbook.

The materials were orientated to the needs of barely literate participants. *Learning About Small Business* was written to a low level of English and assumed little knowledge of modern technology. It was envisaged that someone literate would lead a group through the activities and discussions in the Participant's Workbook; the oral tradition of most Pacific Island countries makes working in small groups an acceptable and friendly way of learning.

The package was evaluated closely during its development and modified according to feedback. A draft version was shown to members of the COL Pacific TVET Committee at the UNESCO conference in Adelaide in March 2001. Amendments were made and the package produced and distributed during 2001.

Samoa Polytechnic has piloted the programme and the CEO, Mr. Lene details their experience below. Vanuatu Institute of Technology is translating the materials into Bislama and plans to deliver the programme through rural education centres. The Small Business Enterprise Unit in the Cook Islands is currently evaluating the package and intends to translate it for use in their outlying islands. There has been considerable enthusiasm by local government, non-government agencies and church groups in Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa, Fiji and the Cook Islands for the resource to be available.

### ***The Samoan Experience in Piloting ODL Course Material on “Learning About Small Business”***

#### Background

As a result of the meeting of the experts in the development of open distance learning material at the COL head office Vancouver, October 2000, it was agreed that The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ) and Samoa Polytechnic would work together in developing ODL course material in basic entrepreneurial skills. TOPNZ then designed the course, “Learning About Small Business” and Samoa Polytechnic was given the first set of materials, March 2001, to be tried and piloted with the local organisations that are implementing projects for communities and rural areas developments.

The materials consist of three parts:

- Adaptation Guide for the Institute
- Tutors Guide
- Participants Workbook

The following changes were made when the materials were received from TOPNZ based on the needs of the target group; namely adult learners in the rural areas and also Samoa Polytechnic academic policies:

- Translation of the Participant’s Workbook to Samoan;
- Writing up of Learning Outcomes and Performance Criteria’s for each topic to be in line with Samoa Polytechnic Academic policies for any new programme or course(s) offered;
- Writing up of a Learner Profile and a Graduate profile for the programme;
- Use of local graphics/pictures to replace original graphics.

The pilot project was then implemented in two phases.

#### Phase 1 – Piloting the Program with Local Trainers

A national cross-section of tutors/trainers representatives from the following organisations were invited to attend a one-day round the table discussion to pilot the programme:

- Women in Business Foundation
- Samoa Visitor’s Bureau
- Department of Youth, Sport’s & Culture
- Department of Women’s Affairs
- Department of Agriculture (Extension Unit)
- National Council of Women

Each participant was given the two English manuals (Participant's Workbook and the Tutor's Pack) together with the Samoan translation of the Participant's Workbook. Discussion was mainly on the Samoan version of the Participants Workbook because the final copy of the Samoan version will be used as a guide to make changes to the English version of the Participants Workbook and the Tutor's Manual.

Local tutors/trainers reacted very positively towards the programme and gave their full support to Samoa Polytechnic and COL. They have also ensured their commitment to work closely with the on-going design, delivery and evaluation of the programme.

#### Outcomes of Phase 1 of the Pilot Exercise

The following are the main outcomes of the pilot exercise:

- Trainers fully support the programme and confirmed the need for small business skills in the distance learning mode particularly for rural area communities. This provides greater accessibility to our communities to learn useful skills that can and will improve their standards of living;
- Trainers confirmed the need for the Participant's Workbook to be presented in Samoan. This will assist in the learning, as most learners in the target group are comfortable learning in the Samoan language. Learners also have the choice of either using the Samoan version or the English version or both.
- Re-wording of content and use of appropriate language (simple and specific) to suit target group in the Samoan version of Participant's Workbook;
- Original graphics or pictures to be replaced with local pictures in order to promote familiarity for the learners and to make course material more user friendly; e.g. local commercial banks, village stores, Samoa's Department of Justice etc;
- Focus of the course material to be broadened to small business that not only services tourists but also the local market. Re-wording of content to reflect this;
- Part Two of the Participants Workbook on Communication and Technology to still be included but to be more of an awareness for the learner on the technology available that could assist the development of the small business;
- Use of audio tapes and videos as learning aids are not appropriate at this stage. This can be produced at a future stage once learners have adapted the use of written manuals. Most village communities have little access to video machines and tape recorders. However, written course materials presented as manuals are sufficient at this stage, provided they are self explanatory and well written.

#### Phase 2 – Piloting of the Project to Village Communities

Phase 2 of the pilot project involved the six identified local trainers taking the programme to the grassroots level. The trainers used the adapted course material from phase 1 and piloted this with the village communities that they work with.

Both English and Samoan versions were made available allowing the participants to choose the language of instruction preferred.



Samoa Polytechnic also designed a programme evaluation questionnaire which was written in English and Samoan. This questionnaire was given to the participants to obtain feedbacks on the following areas:

- The usefulness of the programme in acquiring new knowledge and skills;
- The level of difficulty of the course material;
- The appropriate use of language;
- Was the Participants Workbook easy to understand?
- Comments for further improvements to the programme

The trainers were given four weeks to pilot the programme. Samoa Polytechnic conducted a one-day follow-up workshop with the local trainers to get feedback from the participants in the village communities.

#### Outcomes of Phase 2 of the Pilot Exercise

There were two distinct areas that required further adaptation based on the feedback from participants.

- The first one involved further changes in the use of language in the Samoan version to reflect simplicity and appropriate use of words to suit the learners at the grassroots level.
- The second one suggested using local pictures on the cover page for each new topic.

Emphasis was on making the pictures coloured rather than presenting it in black and white and should incorporate a variety of examples of small business in Samoa. Samoa Polytechnic however will need to weigh out the costs of incorporating the suggestions of having a coloured manual with more pictures.

#### Final Adaptation

The last phase of the pilot project is to work on the instructional design for the Participant's Workbook. Additional information will also be added to the Tutor's Pack providing more specific notes on how to deliver the content in terms of the learning outcomes for each topic.

Once the instructional design is completed and all the adaptation has been carried out, the final copies will be printed and given to the local trainers at the beginning of July 2002. Copies will also be sent to the members of the Pacific TVET Association.

Samoa Polytechnic will assist in areas requiring programme development and design if needed in the future.

#### Conclusion

The overall report on the promotion, development and adaptation of ODL course materials within an island state level was well accepted. It was a challenge though to the local institute or TVET provider due to the nature of such an educational option and the way the institutes' staff and people in the communities and rural areas look at it.

In the case of Samoa, ODL has never been prepared and delivered at the community or grassroots level. They are mainly available at the tertiary level for studies with overseas institutes. The inputs from representatives of the local organisations working with the communities was crucial in ensuring acceptance by the target group of such a learning method and materials, for its success and sustainability. It took some time to convince the institute's staff and organisations representatives on ODL's positive impact because of the higher level of accessibility by people out in the rural areas at a limited cost. The other area of concern was training of local staff on how to develop the materials at the very basic level to meet communities' needs and in the ODL mode and format. This however was and will be improvised through assistance provided by COL through TOPNZ in having local staff attending workshops/seminars hosted by TOPNZ. Samoa Polytechnic has already have plans to establish an ODL unit by the end of 2002 pending on annual budgetary funds available.

It is envisaged that other island states will be facing similar challenges and hope that the Samoan experience will assist them in reducing time and cost for the development of ODL in their respective countries. The close network between the Pacific TVET Association, COL and TOPNZ will strengthen the responsibilities for ownership of the ODL programmes by the Pacific Island States and the importance of using the regional approach strategy as a cost effective method through sharing ideas, experiences and resources.

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<sup>i</sup> The Commonwealth of Learning: Developing a Strategic Plan for Pacific Island Member Countries, July 1999

<sup>ii</sup> Resolution By Commonwealth Pacific Island Ministers of Education, March 6, 2000. (On file COL)