



## **MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP FOR ODFL IN THE PACIFIC: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE FROM COL**

### **BACKGROUND**

- As agreed in the Agreement and Implementation Plan, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) undertook the mid-term evaluation of the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific, covering the period from 1 November 2020 – 30 November 2022.
- After a selection process with the review panel members comprising MFAT, COL and PACFOLD, the mid-term evaluation was commissioned by a New Zealand-based evaluation consulting firm, Standard of Proof, with Dr Patricia Vermillion Peirce as the Principal Evaluator and two other co-evaluators (Derek Wenmoth and Simon Williamson).
- The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a summative and formative assessment based on the six questions:
  - How cost-effectively and timely is the ODFL implementation? (*efficiency*)
  - How is the programme contributing to the intended outcomes? (*effectiveness*)
  - How relevant is the programme to the needs of partners and member states? (*relevance, coherence & alignment*)
  - How sustainable are the interventions and results of the programme? (*sustainable development outcomes*)
  - How well is the ODFL programme addressing gender equality? (*gender equality inclusion*)
  - How well does the programme consider resilience in implementation and demonstrate resilient outcomes? (*resilient development outcomes*)
- The evaluation was also intended to identify challenges, opportunities and lessons learned and make recommendations that COL and PACFOLD can use to improve implementation for the remaining years.
- The evaluation comprised three stages: Stage 1 on secondary data review with over 150 documents; Stage 2 on interviews with the key stakeholders (MFAT, COL, PACFOLD, COL Focal Points, TVET and NGO partners); Stage 3 on synthesis and sense-making session.
- The evaluation complied with the [MFAT's Code of Conduct](#). And followed the International Development Cooperation Programme evaluation principles, delivering useful, credible findings relevant to the purpose of the evaluation.



## MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

### *a. Overall findings and conclusions*

| OVERALL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS   | RESPONSE   |
|--|--|
| The Activity has been efficient, thus far.   | Noted.   |
| The Activity has been and remains relevant.  | Noted.   |
| The Activity has been mostly coherent, and where it isn't the duplication encourages capacity development. | Noted.   |
| The Activity has been effective thus far.  | Noted.   |
| There is some evidence that the Activity has been achieving equality for women, but more data is needed.   | Noted. We will pay attention to gathering gender disaggregated data from the workstreams. In open, online courses we have followed the global practice of to making it optional for the learner to state gender. |
| Countries are working towards greater resilience in the face of emergency situations.                      | Noted.   |
| The Activity was working towards sustainability.   | Noted.   |

### *b. Recommendations*

| RECOMMENDATIONS   | RESPONSE  | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|---|----------------|
| 1. Consider the lessons learned from the first half of the Activity, and determine what can be improved in light of the design and delivery of the Activity. Present options to the Activity Steering Committee, as relevant. | Accepted. Recommendations would be sent to the Steering Committee (latest by July 15, 2023).                                | COL            |
| 2. Reconsider the work required to deliver project 3.1. Present options to the Activity Steering Committee, as relevant, making clear the extent of the outputs that are achievable and the budgetary implications.           | Accepted. A revised workplan will be developed consultatively and sent to the Steering Committee (latest by July 29, 2023). | COL            |



|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>3. Ensure data is collected on gender, disability and region/rurality, and other marginalized groups relevant to the nations. Identify periodic opportunities to help make sense of these data with those implementing the projects and adapt the design or delivery as appropriate. Then highlight the learning and subsequent changes to the Steering Committee.</p> | <p>Accepted. This will be included in six-monthly reports starting November 2023.</p>  | <p>COL</p>                                       |
| <p>4. Consider engagement and leadership opportunities, making use of the Partnership's collective skills and networks to develop climate-related disaster resilience across the Pacific. Discuss these opportunities and funding implications with the Steering Committee and/or MFAT.</p>   | <p>Accepted. A process will be initiated to develop a detailed note for discussion in the next Steering Committee. <a href="#">COL's strategy and plan for education and climate action</a> provides the basis for the engagement.</p> | <p>Partnership (COL, PACFOLD)</p>                |
| <p>5. Reconsider the aims and expected outputs in relation to project 3.3. Establish roles and responsibilities alongside any new or changed deliverables.</p>  | <p>Accepted. We will seek a meeting convened by MFAT with COL, PACFOLD and relevant other partners identified by MFAT to develop a revised workplan (to be sent to the Steering Committee by 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).</p>         | <p>MFAT, with the Partnership (COL, PACFOLD)</p> |
| <p>6. Consider opportunities to leverage relationships, coordinating efforts to support nations to overcome the known barriers to ODFL, secure the required commitments and associated resourcing for adopting ODFL more systematically, and enable secured data systems.</p>   | <p>Accepted. COL will partner with PACFOLD to build a systematic strategy to mainstream ODFL in the framework of <a href="#">PacREF</a> (to deliver a paper to the Steering Committee by November 2023).</p>                           | <p>Partnership (COL, PACFOLD)</p>                |



**c. Considerations for the next steps**

The original budget did not include the extensive engagement and support needed to help countries develop disaster recovery policies that maintain sovereignty in relation to cloud-based storage locations (SS). This is affecting the timelines, and it may incur additional costs on COL (workstream 3.1).

***Response: Noted. This is accepted as part of the recommendations. A revised work plan will be developed.***

COL staff recognised that contracting others to deliver the work requires some travel and risk in relation to the quality of the work. There needs to continue to be travel costs included to ensure that the work is delivered to the quality expected, and this may be more time-consuming than originally envisioned.

***Response: Noted.***

Infrastructure, particularly internet connectivity and device accessibility were found to be an ongoing challenge for training and accessibility to OER and ODFL (COL03, PIC05). For example, in some regions less than half of the schools have access to the internet (PIC06). In another region where there was internet access, online congestion was found to be an issue, especially for those in rural areas with rural wages, “where the connection is poor, and the cost is high” (PIC05). Some PICs are beginning to find ways to overcome these challenges, but this is not yet systematically solved across or within nations. In turn, these practical challenges impact the progress that can be made in preparing PICs for education continuity after a natural disaster using online methods.

***Response: Noted. Within outputs with the flexibility built into the MEL framework, we will accommodate the changing requirements.***

The Activity would benefit from expanding upon the existing theory of change and make clear the coordinated activities to all those involved ‘who’, ‘what’, and ‘how’ the different activities are expected to work towards growing an ODFL – capable workforce, ideally in each PIC. The theory should identify elements of the Activity design and delivery that could further promote teacher-development, alongside the unique challenges and opportunities relevant to each country. The process of expanding upon the theory should ideally identify specific actions and people required to achieve this capacity goal, and can be used to create buy-in and commitment.

***Response: Noted. We will reflect on the outputs achieved and outcomes generated while re-working the Theory of Change.***



In some Ministries of Education, there are further opportunities for the work to align to existing capabilities within the country. This includes, for instance, inclusivity departments and qualification authorities.

***Response: Noted. We will adjust activities suitably in particular countries.***

The courses require start-up costs for youth to be able to develop their skills into businesses (NGO01). The costs are for materials or products needed for their businesses, and sometimes they are too much for young people to afford (NGO01). Therefore, these costs can be limiting and become a hinderance in preventing willing youth from participating in the courses (NGO01). Having the courses formally recognised may support the approval of loans (SS), if this is what the participant wants to pursue.

***Response: Noted. We will work towards gaining formal recognition for courses using the insights from COL's L3F initiative.***

The activities were reportedly happening “in pockets”, and there are opportunities to coordinate local capabilities to achieve the goals and sustain the activities and results. For instance, universities, technical colleges and government agencies providing training and accrediting teachers, alongside the range of Ministry departments relevant to this work, but within (learning and development units, e-learning units) and between government departments.

***Response: Noted. Some of the considerations are foundational in nature. COL will set up regular meetings with partners to address them in finding a way forward.***

Although appreciative of the resources, some barriers to delivery, such as language, culture, and digital literacy, were mentioned. Firstly, language was viewed as a barrier to delivery (COL03). The toolkits are designed in English, which makes it challenging for some regions, depending on if or when English is introduced at school (COL03). Closed captions for videos on YouTube may support accessibility for learners who do not have English as a first language (SD58). Culture was also articulated as a barrier for delivery. The philosophy of lifelong learning is a new concept for many in the regions, so cultivating that belief is taking time (COL03). Lastly, digital literacy, specifically the access to devices is slow to progress, contributing to already delayed communication between parties (COL03).

***Response: Noted. This set of suggestions are useful in planning further activities in WS 3.2.***



Women across the Pacific likely experience unique barriers to both enrolling in and completing courses. It is important for the design to require the collation and reporting of gender statistics so that the design and delivery can address the known gender inequities in the system (if required).

***Response: Noted and accepted (this is also a part of the recommendations).***

There are opportunities to build these links, taking leadership in promoting further regional cooperation.

***Response: Noted. We will advance regional TEL meetings further.***

#### ***d. Making a difference: actions arising from the Mid-Term Evaluation***

We have identified broad actions that will follow the acceptance of the recommendations. We have also noted a few considerations for actions from the suggestions for next steps. Combining them, we can group our actions into three groups of strategies:

##### ***1. Restructuring for results***

Two recommendations on workstream 3.1 (data resilience) and workstream 3.3 (support for the work on regional tools for e-science) require a comprehensive restructuring of the work plans to achieve the intended outcome. We will do the restructuring consultatively, involving relevant stakeholders. For WS 3.1, the consultation will be primarily with the Ministries of Education, who are particular about evolving policies for data protection for education. For WS 3.3, we will work with the stakeholders identified by MFAT for the COL-PACFOLD partnership to play a more direct and effective role in generating regional outcomes in capacity building of teachers in STEM topics.

##### ***2. Refocusing on data capture for effective outcomes***

The evaluation shows the need for us to introduce and manage more focused efforts to gather data on gender equality and inclusivity. We will change our practices in online data gathering to make necessary changes. We will be more proactive in gathering data in face-to-face contexts. This will have implications for the design of activities in all workstreams. In post-course surveys, online or face-to-face, we will redefine some of the questions to address inclusion more directly. We will organise periodic meetings in virtual mode or face-to-face with stakeholders to discuss the trends using the data gathered for adaptive changes in the six-monthly workplans.



### ***3. Reworking and expanding the Theory of Change***

The evaluation has stressed the need for expanding the Theory of Change (ToC) for the project. The expanded ToC will guide our work on capacity building of teachers where the adoption of the flexible learning paradigm requires redefining completion as an output parameter. There is a clear need to enable Ministries to play a key role in adapting regional OER for the context of the country. The current ToC did not include a role for mentors, and it will be changed to recognise the requirement for mentoring for success in flexible online learning. The process of expanding the theory will also be used to create buy-in and commitment to sustainability.