



Evaluation Summaries

Education, Employability and Decent Work for Youth in Pacific Island Countries – Pacific YEP

Quick Facts

Countries: Sub-regional covering 5 Pacific island countries of Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

Final Evaluation: March 2010

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Technical Areas: Youth, Skills & Employability, Enterprise

Evaluation Management: ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok (Evaluation Manager: Pamornrat Pringsulaka)

Evaluation Team: Tony Powers

Project Start: April 2008 (delayed one year)

Project End: April 2010

Project Code: RAS/06/53/NET

Donor: Government of Netherlands
(US\$2,125,000)

Key Words: Youth Employment, start your own business (SIYB), TREE

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

Youth unemployment in Pacific Island Countries is a serious and growing problem. Annual population growth rates in Pacific Island Countries are between 2.2 and 2.7 per cent and more than half the total population is under 20. Labour market growth has failed to keep up with population growth. Formal sector employment in many countries is limited and the majority of economically active people work in the informal economy, either in subsistence production or in modest cash earning activities. As young people

leave school or training institutions and enter the labour market, they face intense competition for jobs and the real possibility of long term unemployment.

Education, Employability and Decent Work for Youth in Pacific Island Countries (YEP) was funded as a three year project, covering the period April 2007 to April 2010 through the Netherlands-ILO Cooperation Program (NICP). The project operated in five countries, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Vanuatu, Samoa and Solomon Islands. In essence, YEP aimed to do three things – increase knowledge of youth employment issues in each country; improve the capacity of stakeholders to address these issues; and run pilot projects designed to test different approaches to supporting youth to get jobs or start their own businesses.

Present situation of project

Due to delays in the appointment of a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), YEP did not commence until April 2008. A reprogramming exercise was conducted at the end of 2008 and this led to some adjustments to planned project outputs and a \$US 375,000 reduction in the budget. The project concluded on 30 April 2010.

Purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation

The Terms of Reference specified the following purpose, scope and clients for the evaluation:

Purpose

Assess the achievement of the project's outcomes and outputs from the resources invested and any positive impact in relation to policies, processes, behaviour and lives of young people, as well as, in analysing what has worked well and what has not so that it can contribute to organizational learning and the continuous improvement of ILO's tools and approaches;

Assess the challenges and opportunities that the project faced;

Provide suggestions and inputs for the design of new or expansion project on youth employment.

Scope

The scope of the evaluation would cover all geographical areas in 5 countries and take into account all interventions of the project. The evaluation mission would be undertaken in 3 countries - Kiribati, PNG and Vanuatu.

Clients

The principal clients of this evaluation were the project management, the ILO Office in Suva and in Bangkok, the Evaluation Unit, the backstopping units in Bangkok, the YEP in Geneva for NAP, the Donor (the Government of Netherlands) and the ILO constituents in relevant countries.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation mission was undertaken between 28 February and 28 March 2009 and included visits to three of the five project country locations as well as to the ILO's sub-regional office in Suva, Fiji.

Tony Powers, an independent consultant based in Sydney, Australia, undertook the evaluation mission and wrote the report. Pamornrat Pringsulaka, an Evaluation and Monitoring Officer based in Bangkok, acted as the Evaluation Manager. UN evaluation norms and standards, OECD/DAC evaluation quality standards and ethical safeguards were all followed in the evaluation.

In all locations visited, meetings were held with the peak employer and worker organizations and with key government agencies including employment, youth affairs, economic development and planning. Gender equality issues were discussed with project staff and in meetings with stakeholders. Evaluation methods included desk top review of reports and project documents, telephone and email contacts, and field visits and stakeholder interviews.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance

The situation of young people in the Pacific Island Countries remains a critical issue, acknowledged by all the stakeholders. In its policy intent and objectives, YEP was therefore highly relevant to the labour market situation in the five participating Pacific Island Countries.

Design

The operational and geographical scope of the project design was too ambitious – particularly given the small size of the ILO's sub-regional office in Suva and that office's lack of experience in running multi-location projects. Running multiple activities in five countries (and managing these from a sixth) placed a heavy strain on project staff in terms of understanding local issues, building relationships, identifying appropriate project partners, running local activities and, in particular, monitoring and reporting on progress. With the project starting a year late, there was an opportunity to revise the project design, but this did not occur until the end of 2008.

The primary tools chosen for the pilot projects were CB TREE (Community Based Training for Regional Economic Empowerment) and SIYB (Start and Improve Your Business). CB TREE was a completely new tool in the context of the Pacific and little or no expertise or technical backup were available for it from the supervising ILO office in Bangkok. Project staff themselves had no experience in the use of this methodology. SIYB was more established in some parts of the Pacific, but its materials needed to be updated. Technical backup for SIYB was available from Bangkok.

The performance indicators included in the project document and used for monitoring and reporting purposes were inadequate.

Implementation

Considering the condensed timeframe in which the project has been operating, YEP has quickly initiated project activities in the five participating countries and has organised a number of sub-regional workshops and projects. The speed of implementation, however, sometimes came at the cost of quality and the provision of adequate support and follow up. Key outputs of the project were:

- **The development of National Action Plans on Youth Employment (NAPs)** in some of the participating countries. Through YEP, specialist ILO expertise has been organised to assist Vanuatu and, possibly, Kiribati to develop their NAPs. Other countries may follow.
- **Research and desk studies.** These were intended to improve regional knowledge of youth labour market issues. A five-country desk review conducted by the University of the South Pacific was completed, but not distributed widely. It was presented at a sub-

regional workshop, but country representatives were not happy with certain elements of it, claiming it was dated and inaccurate.

- **Advocacy work** at the Pacific sub-regional and national level continued throughout the project. This took many forms. While difficult to assess the impact of this work, there was general agreement among those consulted in the evaluation that YEP had focused attention on youth employment issues, raising the profile of the ILO in the process.
- **Institutional capacity building** took the form of targeted Pacific sub-regional and national workshops initially. While these were well attended and focused on issues of relevance to government ministries, employer organizations, unions and youth organizations, follow up in some instances was patchy.
- **SIYB** 17 SIYB trainers were accredited across the five countries and 376 participants were reported to have undergone the training under YEP. The SIYB training materials were updated and contextualised for use in the Pacific. In Vanuatu SIYB has been formally accredited as a course in the national training system. Follow up and tracking of course participants has, however, not been done systematically, so SIYB outcome data for YEP is largely unavailable.
- **CB TREE** 15 people were trained in the delivery and management of CB TREE across the five countries. 313 project participants received short duration skills training in four countries. 278 participants received basic training in basic business planning. 22 projects were started in total. A Pacific CB TREE manual is currently being developed. At the time of the evaluation, the Kiribati and PNG projects were still in their very early implementation stages. In Vanuatu, where the projects started earlier, 4 of the 6 projects had collapsed and the remaining 2 were barely viable. The Samoan projects were reported to be doing well and providing livelihoods for their participants, but these projects were not visited.
- **Other pilot projects** were also supported through YEP. In Kiribati a Temporary Work Placement scheme was funded that provided work experience to unemployed youth. In Vanuatu and Youth Employment Service run by an NGO was supported.

Efficiency

The most significant resource lost by the project was time. Considering that a whole year was lost, YEP managed to initiate an impressive and diverse range of project activities in a significantly reduced timeframe. In this sense, the project has been efficient and productive and has maintained a high delivery rate.

Running the project in five countries and managing it from a sixth had the advantage of better linking YEP activities to broader sub-regional and ILO activities, but also meant that the CTA was required to spread her time and support thinly across multiple locations and to spend much time travelling.

National Officers were used to good effect in the locations visited and, considering the high level of skill and experience that they brought to their roles and the relatively low NO salary costs involved, represented a very efficient use of program funds.

Management

The YEP project was managed from the ILO sub-regional office in Suva, where a CTA, one NPO, an SIYB support officer (working on an *ad hoc* basis and not funded through the project) and an administration officer were based. National Project Officers were at various times based in Kiribati, Vanuatu, Samoa, and PNG. These field officers indicated that they received good support and regular visits from Suva, though were sometimes frustrated by the emphasis on improving the “delivery rate” at the expense of project monitoring.

In all of the countries visited, the project received good political, technical and administrative support from its national partners.

The project had some difficulties in the area of technical backstopping and project staff may not have fully understood this role. Staff in Bangkok indicated that project staff were reluctant to engage with them, seek their advice or share key planning documents. Geographic location hindered communication between YEP and the ILO Regional Office in Bangkok and the Head Office in Geneva - missions to Suva are extremely costly and there are no common working hours between Suva and Geneva.

Impact

The project has some concrete outputs that will remain such as the SIYB and TREE training package. However, many areas of project activity represent just the start of a process. Outcomes include:

- National Ministries of Labour and Youth in Kiribati and Vanuatu have benefited greatly from YEP and are now well placed to develop NAPs that will provide a strategic framework for youth employment initiatives and a mechanism for coordination.
- The workers' organization in Kiribati is involved in youth employment issues. A youth wing in PNG was reported by project staff to have been established in March 2010 (after the evaluation mission). Little or no progress has been in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands and Samoa.
- Employers' organizations are also involved in youth employment initiatives – for example, in Kiribati they are running a work experience program, in Kiribati and Vanuatu they are delivering SIYB, and in PNG and Vanuatu they are promoting gender equality.
- In most cases, it is too early to tell if the CB TREE pilots have had an impact on youth employment and income levels. In Vanuatu, where projects started earlier, most fell over with a few months due largely to a lack of resources and support. In Samoa, the projects were reported to be doing well, but seem to have had some advantages absent in other locations.
- The impact of SIYB on youth in the participating countries is largely unknown. Little or no post-training follow-up was done and information was not systematically collected on the number, type and nature of new businesses created or of existing businesses that may have been expanded or improved. Trainers reported that, in general, participants reviewed the training delivery very favourably.
- Through YEP, SIYB and TREE training materials were tailored to the needs of Pacific countries and this is an important legacy of the project. The SIYB package was regarded by trainers as very good and appropriate to local needs while the TREE training materials are being finalized for later distribution.
- Of the other pilot projects implemented, the Kiribati Temporary Work Placement Project has had some good results. 8 of the 33 participants of the project were offered full time jobs at the end of their placements. The Vanuatu Youth Employment Service now has over 1000 young people registered for its services.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

- Ensure that all YEP-initiated CB TREE projects that are still operating have access to ongoing technical support and business advice.
- Encourage (and, if necessary, fund) SIYB training providers to make contact with all young people who have participated in SIYB training to gather more data on quantitative and qualitative data on outcomes.
- In any future CB TREE projects funded in the Pacific, more care needs to be taken in the assessment of project ideas, the selection of project participants, the delivery of appropriate technical training, the delivery of training in business awareness and business planning, the choice of capable partners to manage the projects and the provision of continuous and accessible support. Expert technical assistance should be obtained from the Skills and Employability division of the ILO and projects need to be adequately funded.
- The Bangkok office of the ILO should commission a research project to examine the effectiveness of SIYB in meeting the specific business start-up needs of young people (aged 16 to 21). Models for the provision of ongoing support for this group (e.g. mentoring) need also be identified or developed.
- For all future ILO projects of this size, an independent mid-term evaluation should be completed, even if on a relatively small scale.
- Project work plans need to be kept up to date and shared with ILO backstopping staff.
- In any future youth employment projects, gender initiatives should ideally address issues relevant to the project's primary theme (e.g. the employment needs of young women). The gender-related activities of YEP, while worthwhile, did not specifically address youth issues.
- Incorporate the lessons learned in YEP's pilot delivery of CB TREE into local resource material (including the Pacific CB TREE Manual currently being developed.)
- Technical backstopping staff need to be fully utilised to ensure that project activity is well designed and supported. This is particularly important where ILO tools (such as CB TREE) are being introduced in a country for the first time.

Important lessons learned

- At project commencement, planned activities should have been comprehensively reviewed and chosen on the basis of what would best achieve the project's objectives - not on the basis of budget preservation. This project planning exercise should be collectively reviewed by project team and the backstopping unit and other ILO technical service units with wide consultation with ILO constituents and national stakeholders.
- Too much emphasis can be placed on maintaining project "delivery rates" (i.e. expenditure rates) at the expense of achieving effective and sustainable outcomes.
- Projects suffer when the ILO "borrows" project staff to do other things.
- Project steering committees need to be established and active in each project location. They should make recommendations on which projects are funded, but ILO should retain the final decision on expenditure.
- Workshops have their place, but it can be frustrating for partner organizations to be simply shown what they are not doing without being given practical follow up assistance (e.g. the Labour Market Information and Analysis workshops).
- "Pilot projects" are by definition designed to test the effectiveness of different approaches. To do this, there is a need to put in place processes to gather outcome data that relate to the project's objectives including quantitative and qualitative information.
- It would be far better to run a few projects and resource them well than to run many projects on a shoestring budget.
- Technical backstopping is vital to the success of multi-disciplinary projects like YEP. ILO enterprise specialists (e.g. for SIYB) and skills specialists (e.g. for CB TREE) needed to be better used in the delivery of the project. Technical backstopping in Youth Employment would also have been helpful at an earlier stage of the project. At project commencement, technical backstopping support (roles and responsibilities) should be clarified with project staff and be well-planned and well-resourced.
- More care needs to be taken in selecting organizations to manage activities. In some cases, they had neither the resources nor the expertise to effectively support the activities they were contracted to manage (e.g. CB TREE in Vanuatu).
- SIYB may need to be adapted to better meet the need of young people and embedded in a broader program of support (including mentoring and microfinance). SIYB needs to be linked to TREE.
- A project exit strategy needs to be developed at least three months prior to the project conclusion. Where activities are expected to continue beyond the project completion date, alternative support and monitoring mechanisms need to be put in place. (It was reported that a Project Completion Partners Dialogue was organized from 14-16 April 2010 to chart the way forward to sustain and continue the activities and achievements of YEP in all five countries.)