

Skills for Solomon Islands: Second chances

Opening new opportunities

New economic opportunities are available to Solomon Islands, at home and overseas; but a serious skills deficit constrains Solomon Islanders from accessing them.

Available evidence suggests that the lack of functional literacy may be a major constraint on the life and livelihoods of many Solomon Islanders. While 90 percent of Solomon Islanders surveyed had some formal schooling, and literacy is regarded as important to livelihoods beyond subsistence agriculture, functional literacy rates in major provinces are as low as 7 to 17 percent. Not enough Solomon Islanders gain and maintain basic skills like literacy from school. To prepare for new opportunities in employment and enterprise, Solomon Islanders need second chances to gain and regain basic skills.

Getting basic education quality right for the majority of students is the most cost-effective intervention to improve the availability of skills needed to improve employment outcomes and economic opportunities over the long term. Basic education is important to provide a solid foundation in key skills such as reading, writing and maths. Secondary education and TVET can develop specific competencies, skills, behaviours and attitudes, such as cooperation and social responsibility, which enable young people to participate in modern society and the workplace.

Education and training improve the productivity and earnings of people who are informally and formally employed, and prepare workers for labour opportunities at home and abroad. Informal opportunities are important as the formal sector alone is not likely to provide employment opportunities for the majority of Solomon Islanders. Both formal and informal sectors require higher education levels than subsistence farming. Research on skills formation for the informal sector in Africa confirms the importance of basic education for all, which helps to establish a solid foundation for further skills development.¹ Primary and lower secondary education provide the cognitive skills which enable later acquisition of technical skills, and which enable further secondary and post-secondary education to prepare individuals for employment. This foundation in cognitive skills is also important to subsequent re-skilling and upgrading of workers. There is a strong, positive link between education and training, and the probability of both informal and formal off-farm employment. Given the limited number of formal jobs in Solomon Islands, non-farm-based, informal and self-employment offer opportunities to increase incomes and reduce poverty beyond subsistence agriculture. Improving informal sector productivity is essential for employment and income growth for the majority of Solomon Islanders.

This Informal Briefing Note is extracted from the World Bank report, *Skills for Solomon Islands: Opening New Opportunities*, Stephen Close, World Bank Sydney, October 2012. Please see the full report for full references and copyright information.

¹ World Bank, 'Improving Skills Development in the Informal Sector: Strategies for Sub-Saharan Africa', July 2, 2012.

The national challenge of illiteracy indicates continued basic education quality concerns.

These concerns have been raised by the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) given the high rate of students in the formal education system unable to read and write. In 2007, the Solomon Islands Standardised Testing & Assessment (SISTA) measured literacy and numeracy achievements for students completing Year 6 in 2005 and 2006. The results were updated in SISTA 2 in 2010, showing an improvement in literacy figures, but only a small improvement in numeracy. Still, in Year 4 in 2010, 68 percent of students were below satisfactory level in literacy. A key reason for poor results is the need for students to learn English and Pijin as new languages beyond their mother tongue to participate in education.² With too few children graduating from basic education with basic literacy skills, illiteracy forms a nationwide challenge. In Solomon Islands' National Literacy Proposal, MEHRD identified illiteracy as a major factor in limited socio-economic development, poor health and sanitation, lack of economic diversification, poor natural resource management, low employment, and low participation in community and governance.³

Survey results in four provinces indicate that despite the value of literacy and numeracy to everyday life and livelihoods, too few Solomon Islanders gain these skills from basic education, or retain these skills beyond schooling.

The Literacy and Educational Experience Survey conducted by the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands (COESI) found a significant difference between self-reported, census-based literacy rates and assessed functional literacy rates. While the Solomon Islands Census 2009 estimates a literacy rate of 84.1 percent, the COESI survey found functional literacy rates of respondents ranging from 7 to 33.9 percent of respondents in the four provinces surveyed (Malaita and Honiara in 2007, and Isabel and Renbel in 2010). The findings indicate a crisis in the quality of basic education in imparting literacy and numeracy skills. Primary school attendance is high, but is not guaranteed to ensure literacy. The survey identified functional literacy rates (17.5 percent in Isabel and 33.9 percent in Renbel) which are very low in comparison with the high rates of people stating perceived importance of literacy to daily life (around 60 percent), with the nationally reported literacy rates (84 percent in Isabel and 99 percent in Renbel⁴), and with the number of respondents with some school attendance (over 90 percent). With each school level completed, the literacy rates increased, indicating a positive correlation between school and literacy. While younger cohorts were typically more literate – which could indicate improvements in the education system – the results indicate a major problem of education quality in Solomon Islands, in basic and in secondary education. In Renbel, 65.2 percent of secondary school completers were



Holy Cross literacy school in Honiara: a volunteer teacher with an intermediate level English class. Photo: Stephen Close, World Bank.

literate, and in Isabel only 45.2 percent. That 71.5 percent of adults had completed primary school, yet 17.5 percent and 33.9 percent of respondents in Renbel and Isabel respectively were functionally literate, indicates that their basic education was not sufficient to become, or at least remain, functionally literate. While potentially people lose literacy skills over time, numbers of current primary students with functional literacy was also concerning, at 57.1 percent in Renbel and only 22.6 percent in Isabel.

The survey also indicated the importance of effective second chances to gain skills.

While literacy and schooling were both highly valued, a high proportion of youth found education “not interesting”, suggesting student motivation to learn as a key constraint. Strikingly, even though the survey recorded a high level of participation in community education programmes, in Isabel and Renbel 0.0 percent of those who never attended school were functionally literate. The survey results show not only that there is a clear role for second chance literacy programmes and non-formal learning pathways in Solomon Islands for those who never attended school or who did not gain literacy from attending school, but that these programmes need to be effective and to ‘finish the job’ of teaching literacy. Furthermore, functional literacy is more strongly linked to off-farm livelihood opportunities than educational attainment alone. Enrolment in primary school isn’t enough for better employment outcomes – what matters more is learning how, and continuing to know how, to read and write.^{5,6}

² Solomon Islands Government, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and UNICEF, Barriers to Education Study, 2011.

³ MEHRD, National Literacy Project, 2010.

⁴ SIG, Solomon Islands Census, 2009.

⁵ ASPBAE/COESI Survey, 2010.

⁶ Farchy, Pacific Labor Market Note, World Bank, 2011.

Addressing the skills mismatch requires second and multiple chances to improve skills – with particular benefits for women.

MEHRD's current efforts to improve basic education quality (including in teacher training, school clustering for peer support to teachers, strengthened Inspectorate capacity, and school assessments), and strengthening the quality and relevance of technical and vocational training provision (through Rural Training Centres), are important current initiatives to address the skills mismatch. In addition, those students who don't gain or retain basic literacy and numeracy skills from their enrolment in formal basic education need 'second chances' to gain these skills.⁷ An effective system of second chances through targeted programmes can give young people the hope and the incentive to catch up from bad luck or bad choices.⁸ Second Chance Education and Training (SCET) needs to be responsive even to cater for those who are older learners and may have experience of learning from the formal system as well as life experience. The ASPBAE/COESI report results suggest a SCET strategy focused on literacy skills, life and work skills, and targeted at those excluded from formal schooling, especially girls and youth in remote areas.⁹ If observations that literacy classes are largely attended (and taught on a volunteer basis) by women are correct nationally, women stand to benefit greatly from expansion of literacy classes through the National Literacy Project (NLP) proposal (see box). Combining SCET with Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health services would provide a further avenue to improve life outcomes for women, given the link between teenage pregnancy and school dropout.

Keeping the first chance, offering a second

Three Solomon Islands models

1. The Learn and Play Project

Activities seeking to maintain rural and disadvantaged children in school, or retrieving those who drop out, can include focus on behavioural skills and support to self-confidence and motivation to continue education. Initiated by the Solomon Islands Football Federation (SIFF), the *'Learn and Play Project'* aims to educate disadvantaged rural children at risk of post-primary drop out. Building on the teamwork and behavioural skills gained from playing football, these concepts are used to motivate students to complete their secondary education. A study in 2011 found that students' confidence, self-esteem, academic performance, and enrolment improved through the project. The programme is an example of a focus on behavioural skills as well as academic learning.

2. The Open Schooling Pilot

The University of the South Pacific has been undertaking a regional collaborative research and pilot study of Open Schooling Initiatives in PICs, with a formal equivalence education model. In Solomon Islands, the pilot provides adults (e.g. parents) with the chance to be certified with an education up to Form 5 level. This was piloted at two secondary schools in Honiara. Completing students will sit the same exam as Form 5 students, and if they pass, they can continue to Form 6 as part of regular classes. The approach uses school facilities in the afternoons from 2pm to 7pm, including the same subjects as regular students, with four core and two optional subjects. There is flexibility for students to take more subjects to complete their education faster. Regular school teachers deliver classes and are paid a supplement funded by piloted student fees of around SBD1,000 a year.

3. The National Literacy Project Proposal

The development of a National Literacy Policy in Solomon Islands in 2012 is a major step forward in addressing the national challenge, and can be implemented through the NLP using a non-formal and civil society approach. A collaborative, structured partnership approach between MEHRD and the Literacy Network Solomon Islands, the NLP is intended to provide a framework for establishing, implementing and monitoring effective community literacy classes nationwide. The objective is for all out-of-school Solomon Islanders over 15 to be equipped with literacy skills needed to improve their lives and be empowered to contribute to Solomon Islands. The NLP defines literacy as literacy in Pijin or a mother tongue, to provide a bridge to subsequent English learning. Desired outcomes and outputs include national literacy survey and mapping; advocacy and awareness; literacy materials development and distribution; capacity and quality of literacy trainers; literacy class implementation; and monitoring of teachers and literacy classes. NLP design issues raised by stakeholders through discussions in 2010 and 2011 included cost efficiency; language choice (English, Pijin or local languages) and vernacular language policy; links to non-formal education capacity; methodologies; funding modalities; quality of teachers and delivery; material production; coordination arrangements; capacities of implementing literacy agencies; and definition of outcomes and risks.

Source: Maebuta, 2009; MEHRD, 2010; Discussions with MEHRD, July 2012.

⁷ World Bank, World Development Report, 2007.

⁸ World Bank, World Development Report, 2007.

⁹ ASPBAE/COESI Survey, 2010.



St Augustine Kindergarten, Auki, Malaita.
Photo: Stephen Close, World Bank.

Government and civil society are essential partners for successful provision of second chances. In many Pacific Island Countries, the role of government in second chance youth programmes and non-formal education is limited. Many out-of-school youth live in rural areas where there is little quality school provision, especially at the secondary school level. SCET is generally provided by non-state providers. In Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, SCET aimed at youth is increasing as a government policy priority, but delivery is encouraged and reliant on the activities of communities or Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). The flexible approaches adopted by NGOs enable them to reach parts of the population beyond government reach. Part of their advantage is the ability to work locally, innovatively and on a small scale. In some cases there is potential for provision to be scaled up and integrated with government provision. Civil society knowledge, expertise and capacity are essential to support SCET. The Solomon Islands Government (SIG) has made efforts to bring together representatives of the state and civil society to support second chance education. Through the Solomon Islands Literacy Network, the MEHRD Adult Literacy unit has helped fund and coordinate with NGOs and faith-based organisations operating literacy classes and community-based education (see box). Adult literacy programmes are implemented by NGOs such as Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, World Vision, Church of Melanesia, and other faith-based groups. The Literacy Association of Solomon Islands (LASI) is a key organisation active in advising on policy standards for literacy classes, and preparing and publishing written materials in local languages. Currently, LASI provides some level of coordination and services to Non-Formal Education (NFE) initiatives, including training and resource production. In 2007, MERHD contributed to 43 community-based projects under the TVET/NFE department.¹⁰

Recommendations

Specific recommendations and ideas are available to grow current initiatives and concepts for SCET in order to improve skills and life outcomes for Solomon Islanders nationwide:

- 1) **Expanded implementation of key SCET initiatives** could include scale-up of the Open Schooling Initiative and the NLP through civil society (see box).
- 2) **SCET needs to be effectively targeted to significantly improve outcomes for youth.** SCET services need to reach the most vulnerable populations. Effectively targeted to youth 'drop outs' or 'push outs', several models of SCET and youth-relevant programmes are available to help children keep the first chance, and gain a second chance at education.
- 3) **Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of programmes can help secure political and financial commitment to give people second chances.** A desk study supported by the World Bank's Bank-Netherlands Partnership Programme (BNPP) identified a critical gap in empirical evidence about the most effective ways of delivering and monitoring SCET services to youth. Such evidence is needed to guide implementation and monitoring of the NLP. Programmes should be evaluated on costs and benefits, and informed by labour market analysis including graduate tracer surveying.
- 4) **Government and donors could increase resources for second chance education including literacy training to address literacy needs of out-of-school youth, adults, girls and women, and people living in remote communities.**¹¹ Greater allocation of education expenditure to effective second chance programmes would enable more Solomon Islanders to improve their incomes and employment outcomes.
- 5) **Genuine political commitment and policy action on SCET** is crucial to the development of policy frameworks to provide a national enabling environment, and for locating and funding programme coordination within an appropriate government ministry. Policy action by the government to improve partnerships with civil society could include national standards and policy for Community Learning Centres providing second chance education and community livelihoods training, even if financed by civil society.
- 6) **Life Outcomes for young women could benefit** from linking expanded SCET to adolescent sexual and reproductive health services.
- 7) **Expansion of community-identified, mobile, village-based livelihood skills** would provide second and multiple chances for Solomon Islanders in rural areas to gain livelihood-relevant skills to improve income and productivity of informal and self-employment.

¹⁰ World Bank team discussions with MEHRD, 2009–2010.

¹¹ ASPBAE/COESI Survey, 2007.