



COUNTRY PRESENTATION – SOLOMON ISLANDS

By Bernard Rapasia

Introduction

A scattered archipelago of about 1,000 mountainous islands and low-lying coral atolls, the Solomon Islands lie east of Papua New Guinea and Northeast of Australia in the South Pacific. The islands include: Guadalcanal, Malaita, Santa Isabel, San Cristobal, Choiseul, New Georgia and the Santa Cruz group.

It is thought that people have lived in the Solomon Islands since at least 2000 B.C. Explored in 1568 by Alvaro de Mendana of Spain. In 1886 Great Britain and Germany divided the Islands between them, but Great Britain was given control of the entire territory. The Japanese invaded the Islands in World War II. Britain gained control afterwards in 1945. In 1976, the Solomon Islands became self-governing and gained independence in 1978.

The ethnic crisis almost brought the Islands to a total loss of economy; basic services and the Education System was seriously affected. The Regional Assistance Mission of the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) had been called in to intervene. This proved to be very successful and has generally been effective in restoring law and order and rebuilding the government institutions, enabling Education and services to begin to take serious pathways towards rejuvenation in all aspects. Institutions, schools, including the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), and Technical Vocational Training Centres became functional again.

RAMSI has a long commitment aimed at helping create conditions necessary for the return to stability, peace and growing economy. It has assisted economic recovery as this follows a severe economic contraction and stagnation over the period of the ethnic tension. The economy grew steadily then on the attribution to the return of business investments and an increase in exports from rapidly expanded exports of timber and more favourable terms of trade for other export.

The Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015

The Education Strategic Framework for the period 2007-2015 was derived from the review of the Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006 and the National Education Action Plan (NEAP) 2007-2009. Because of the existence of the National Education Action Plan 2007-2009, this present document has changed in character from the previous Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006. It is nevertheless derived from its predecessor, and is broadly consistent within its original direction. In addition, it is acknowledged that there is a plethora of reports and planning documents relating to education in the Solomon Islands.

The *National Education Action Plan 2007-2009* reflects the needs of all divisions at the national level, of the provinces and needs specific to individual provinces. It is derived from the ten provincial action plans (Central Islands, Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Honiara, Isabel, Makira-Ulawa, Malaita, Rennell and Bellona, Temotu and Western.

The Solomon Islands *National Education Action Plan 2007-2009*:

- is based on three education sector-wide strategic goals (derived from the *Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006*);
- includes a set of outcomes, objectives and expected outputs designed to guide collective action and frame key challenges and potential projects;
- builds on past successes and on that progress made in developing ten provincial education action plans;
- includes a set of activities, human resources and organisations responsible for achieving the expected outputs and outcomes;
- provides a mandate for leadership.

It is a planning document that focuses on a three year time frame (the “shorter term”). That document can be regarded as a “business plan” that provides a focus for action for the whole education sector, with specific proposals that are related to each of the main education sectors, (early childhood education, primary education, junior secondary education, senior secondary education, tertiary education, and technical vocational education and training). It is derived from, and supports, the ten provincial education action plans. The plans of the Church education authorities are reflected in the overall national planning document. The annual work programmes of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), as reflected in the MEHRD’s *Education Corporate Plan 2006-2008*, are also directly related to this plan. Other donor activity will be coordinated with national needs reflected in the national planning.

The *Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015* differs from its predecessor (the *Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006*) in a number of ways:

- its focus is a medium to longer term strategic view of the Solomon Islands education system;
- it concentrates only on high-level goals, outcomes and objectives;
- it includes a benchmark against which other planning documents and proposed initiatives can be measured;
- detailed short-term activities have been eliminated, since these activities are now incorporated in the medium term *National Education Action Plan 2007-2009*;
- *some activities have been deferred for consideration later in the planning cycle.*

This EDS 2007-2015 is therefore intended to be a document that provides overall longer term strategic direction and oversight for the Solomon Islands education system through 2015. The broader policy issues have been presented as higher level objectives in the context of this longer time frame.

Linkages to Global and Regional Context

Education in the Solomon Islands, while an important national priority, is also linked to global international goals for education and to our broader regional context in the Pacific.

This education strategic framework for the Solomon Islands is directly associated with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted at the turn of the century by the United Nations. In particular, the emphasis on achieving access to universal basic education for all Solomon Islands children in our long-term strategic goals is derived directly from the second Millennium Development Goal. The second Millennium Development Goal sets out an aim of achieving universal primary education. The target is to ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school. The target date to achieve the MDGs is 2015 and the period covered by the Solomon Islands Education Strategic Framework (2007-2008) is therefore aligned with this target date.

In addition, the UNESCO sponsored *Asia Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All*, sets out guiding principles, specific goals and targets for 2015. These goals and targets were adopted by the Asia-Pacific Conference on Education for All by 2015, held in Bangkok, Thailand – January 2000 education strategy of the Solomon Islands is linked to and is consistent with this international and regional development.

Vision

Our vision is that all Solomon Islanders will develop as individuals and possess the knowledge, skills and attitude needed to earn a living and to live in harmony with others and their environment. We envisage a united progressive society in which all can live in peace and harmony with fair and equitable opportunities for better life.

Goals

The long-term goals for the Solomon Islands education system are to plan and take action over the planning period (2007-2015) to:

- provide equitable access to quality basic education for all children in the Solomon Islands;
- provide access to community, technical, vocational and tertiary education that all meet individual, regional and national needs for a knowledgeable, skilled competent and complete people;
- manage resources in an efficient, effective and transparent manner.

Strategies

The overarching strategic goal is to provide universal access to quality basic education for all children by 2015, and improved access to technical and vocational education and training. Government has undertaken to place priority on refocusing education sector expenditure on providing services at primary and junior secondary schools to achieve universal basic education by 2015. Six key strategies have therefore been developed as focus for the period 2007-2015.

These six (6) immediate key strategies for development are the following:

- to strengthen planning, management, coordination and monitoring of the SWAp, in particular of the *National Education Action Plan and Education Sector Framework 2007-2015*;
- to develop for Secondary and Tertiary, revise the Education Act, policies and decentralisation process on Teacher Training Development;
- on the basis of a national demand, to ensure longer term interest, technical assistance (including the development of a national TA-pool) and funding from Development Partners for the SWAp, ESRP11, NEAP (2007-2009), ESP (2007-2015);
- to develop and implement a programme of Human Resources Development and capacity building;
- to develop and implement improved and harmonised grants system to support school operational in primary, secondary education in TVET;
- to develop and implement an improved and harmonised school infrastructure programme for primary, secondary education and in TVET.

Outcomes

The MEHRD will direct resources to achieve the following main outcomes.

1. For Basic Education

Outcome 1 (Access and Equality)

All children in the Solomon Islands regardless of gender, ethnicity, location or disability have access to Basic Education, which includes pre-school, primary, and junior secondary schools classrooms, desks, dormitories, equipment and other infrastructure and financial support from government and other stakeholders.

2. For Levels and Types of Education

Outcome 2 (Access and Equality)

People in the Solomon Islands regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, location or disability have improved access to relevant, demand oriented community, technical, vocational or tertiary education achieved through an adequate number of schools or centres, classrooms, desks, dormitories,

equipment and other infrastructure and financial support from government and other stakeholders.

3. For All Levels and Types of Education and Training

Outcome 3 (Quality)

All levels and dimensions of the Solomon Islands education system consistently demonstrate standards of excellence and deliver a quality education, which means high quality of learning achieved through provision of an adequate number of qualified teachers, and other workers, in the education sector, relevant national school curriculum and local curricula, adequate number of modern, relevant teaching and learning materials or facilities, sound standards of student literacy and numeracy.

4. In relation to Management

Outcome 4 (Management)

The management of the Solomon Islands education system is effective and efficient, including effective education policy development, planning and budgeting, effective management of human and financial resources, sound system of monitoring and evaluation, and effective development of appropriate skills and competencies in the education work force.

Priorities

- To increase access to all levels of education;
- To improve equal access to all levels of education;
- To improve quality for all levels of education;
- To improve the management of the Sector Wide Education Programme.

PFnet and the use of DFL in the Solomon Islands Through the DLCP

The Solomon People First Network (PFnet) was started in 2001 through a UNDP programme as a community networking service to reach (some of) the 85% of people in the rural areas. In 2002, PFnet was involved in distance learning trials with the University of the South Pacific (USP) Honiara Centre. This led to the establishment of rural Distance Learning centres being erected in the provinces.

The MEHRD under the National Education Action Plan is to strengthen basic education for all, including continuing education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The need is greatest in the rural areas and the DLCP is one component that addresses this by creating new learning opportunities through the Distance Mode. The Ministry is planning to expand the DLC network to other schools and education institutions such as the Rural Training Centres. In this context, the MEHRD sees the "One Laptop Per Child (OLPC)" initiative as having potential for further expanding the DLCP model to reach out further into the

communities and remote areas, with linkages to a full spectrum of educational services – Literacy, Livelihoods, Academic, Technical, Teacher Professional Development.

Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Learning for Development: is a theme embraced by the Solomon Islands government, the MEHRD for that matter. It is imbedded into the whole sector wide programme of the Ministry of Education and, to that extent, COL's presence is highly viewed and this is to register the serious considerate commitment that COL has already made its mark to the Solomon Islands.

- Opening a new chapter in terms of Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) Policy development, COL had assisted the Ministry of Education in facilitating workshop on the development framework to develop a DFL Policy for the Solomon Islands. Dr. Tanyss Munro is commended for her expertise.
- Recognising the importance to have and put in place Solomon Islands' Focal Point for COL.
- To further that commitment, COL had also involved for the first time Solomon Islands Focal Point to attend a first of its kind of training and that is to do with "WikiEducator" training programme held in New Zealand. Our sincere gratitude goes especially to Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, Jenny Williams and all those who organised the workshop.

Looking into further assistance to the Solomon Islands from COL in the development of DFL/eLearning

COL can assist the Solomon Islands in these areas:

- DLF policy development
- TVET Teacher Training and Capacity Building and ICT Training
- Curriculum development and material production
- Review and strengthen capacity of COL activities.

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