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3.4 Learning to Do: Education for Employment Enterprise

The participation of youth and non-government organisations in non-formal vocational education and training for employment enterprise in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

The paper deals with one of the major challenges for the 21st century in the Asia-Pacific region: the skills development of its youth. In late 1997, the Asian Development Bank and the Government of Papua New Guinea funded a project to develop a policy agenda for Labour, Employment and Skills Development for the next decade in PNG. Using this case study, the paper pays particular attention to non-formal skills development for non-formal employment and community life, and especially the contribution that can be made by non-government organisations and youth. To provide a setting, the paper briefly reviews medium term economic prospects, labour market structure and change, employment policies, the structure of technical and vocational education, and policy recommendations for technical and vocational education and training in PNG. It reports on surveys of young people and visits to youth groups and NGOs in 13 provinces, and details policy recommendations on increasing the participation of youth and NGOs in employment and skills development, specifically on their contribution to non-formal vocational education and training.

Policy reforms suggested include reviewing and implementing existing policy, developing leadership and management capacity in young people, creating partnerships, establishing accreditation and registration systems of NGOs, strengthening NGO skills development activities with young people, sharing power and decision making with youth and NGOs, reviewing curriculum of both formal and non-formal schooling, conducting research, disseminating information, extending youth credit schemes, and establishing a Youth Foundation. Enhancing the participation of youth in PNG is particularly relevant given their previous limited involvement in skills development and the rise of youth crime in urban areas. The achievements of youth in the non-formal sector and their training opportunities are described, and implementation constraints are analysed to provide a basis for policy reforms. Improving planning and coordination of opportunities for youth, and expanding credit schemes to encourage further development of self reliance and income generation activities for young people are recommended.

There is an important role to be played by churches and other NGOs in employment and skills development for young people across the region, and government partnerships with NGOs in PNG could be useful models. Investment in skills development of youth through non-formal education strategies will be critical to the future wellbeing of youth in countries across the Asia Pacific region.

Background

There has been a belief that South Pacific island economies can be sustained by ‘subsistence affluence’; that populations of these countries can always rely on living well, if simply, in the village. However ‘the reality is that this support mechanism is becoming less and less robust: the safety net of the traditional system is beginning to fray’ (ANU, 1994). Not only are the expectations and aspirations of island populations reaching beyond a subsistence lifestyle, there are increasing pressures on finite land resources, pushing young people in particular out of villages into urban areas. The growth of urban unemployment is tragic and links importantly with law and order problems, particularly in PNG, but also across less developed countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Skills development is of strategic importance in countries where workforce skills for both urban and rural areas are generally of a low standard. Endemic shortages of technical and management skills are faced by public, private and NGO sectors in many countries in the region. The lack of human resources and consequent weaknesses in institutional capacity are major contributing factors to the delays encountered in the implementation of investment projects (ADB, 1996). Very few Pacific countries have been able to provide the skills and training that are relevant for raising productivity in agriculture and industry or, indeed, learning for life in modern societies. Studies in how to enhance skills development across the region are needed.

In mid-1997, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Papua New Guinea (GPNG) funded a project to develop a policy agenda for Labour, Employment and Skills Development for the next decade in PNG. A team of six specialists, subcontracted by the Australian consulting firm W D Scott International, carried out the project. Two Papua New Guineans who had experience in VET and NGOs, and four Australians who had expertise in economic and financial analysis, labour and employment market analysis, TVET, and NGOs, women and youth, made up the team. The objective was to draw up a policy agenda to serve as a basis for a substantial ADB package of assistance in the field of employment and skills development.

The team worked in collaboration with a large number of government and non-government organisations and interested individuals. The ADB and the GPNG accepted their report’s recommendations. A memorandum of understanding was signed in November 1997 expressing the intention of both parties to engage consultants to prepare a project to support PNG’s policy reforms in the field of employment and skills development (ADB, 1997). Tenders have been let to commence implementation of the recommendations in 1999.

PNG Economy

The project’s starting point was a realistic assessment of the country’s economic development prospects over the next 10 years, sector by sector. Recent modest growth has been helped by the weaker Kina and, to a small extent, the reduction of the minimum wage. The team concluded that, after a period of about three years of structural adjustment and recovery from the combined effects of the current El Niño event and economic crisis in some of PNG’s economic partners in Asia, a sustained resource-based real growth rate of 5½ percent is achievable in the medium term. Fifty-three percent of the projected growth will occur in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries (21%), and manufacturing, construction, commerce and transport sectors (32%), which are not high skills intensive. Thirty-three percent will occur in the mining, petroleum and gas sectors, which are labour extensive and likely to remain heavily dependent on expatriate skilled

labour. Further progress will depend on the gradual removal of constraints to the development of agriculture, continued investor interest in the resource sectors, and sustained commitment to stable macroeconomic policies, underpinning local and foreign investor confidence.

Formal Labour Market

Although substantially higher than PNG's average growth rate in the past, this predicted rate of growth will not generate enough jobs in the formal sector to absorb a majority of the entrants to the labour force. The PNG labour market can be described as highly fragmented and segmented with a low level of human capital intensity. With the most optimistic projections, the team estimated that 63 percent of the labour force would remain outside the formal sector in 2007. Population growth could exacerbate this figure. The long term growth trend during the past decade has been less than 2 percent per annum above the rate of growth of the population. If the present rate of population growth continues unabated, the population of PNG could reach 20 million within the lifetime of a baby born today (NSO, 1997). Reducing the birthrate is another major challenge for the 21st century for PNG and indeed for many countries across the region.

Non-Formal Sector

The lack of work opportunities in the formal sector turns the spotlight on the non-formal sector and the skills that are appropriate to non-formal employment in both urban and rural areas. There is no alternative to agriculture as the leading provider of employment opportunities in PNG. As people increasingly demand cash incomes, obstacles to cash farming, both for export and for the domestic market, must be identified and removed. Foremost among these obstacles are inadequate and poorly maintained rural transport infrastructure; inadequate schooling, which engenders unrealistic expectations and confers inappropriate skills; and crime, which affects rural as well as urban areas.

Unemployment is essentially an urban phenomenon that disproportionately affects young people who have not completed schooling. There has been some growth of a non-formal urban economy, but it is insignificant compared to PNG's Asian neighbours. In part this is due to cultural differences, but urban crime (itself a form of non-formal economic activity) is a major impediment. Whatever the trends in the formal and cash economy, the subsistence, agricultural and non-formal economies will continue to absorb the bulk of the workforce well into the 21st century. Yet self-employment and family income generation is still a small fraction of all jobs. Some non-formal employment can directly add value to the formal sector, e.g. vegetable growing and chicken farming for mining communities and basic saw milling for construction companies. Basic schooling and skills development for community life and employment in the non-formal sector is thus another challenge for GPNG. This is despite the disturbing fact that the aspirations of perhaps the majority of young people and their families are not in tune with labour market realities, and there are serious obstacles to involvement in non-formal sector work.

Basic Education

Low levels of human capital relate primarily to limited basic education opportunities where PNG still lags substantially behind neighbouring countries. In 1990 over half the population had no schooling and only 10 percent had more than 10 years schooling. By the mid 1990s gross primary enrolment rates were 67 percent for females and 80 percent for males, figures well below the near-universal primary enrolment which prevails in most of the Asia Pacific region. At secondary level the contrast between PNG and other countries in the region was even more stark:

male gross enrolment rates (15 percent) were the *lowest of any country* in the Asia Pacific region and only higher than Afghanistan for females (ADB 1996). Major improvement in basic education remains one of PNG's main developmental challenges, and is a central objective of the Medium Term Development Strategy (1997-2002). Reform of TVET is another huge challenge.

Formal TVET

The team developed a taxonomy of training based on principles of training provision and primary purpose. The primary training purpose was divided into five classifications: non-industry specific, industry specific, enterprise specific, and community specific with another division between the formal and non-formal economic sectors. Providers were divided into three classifications: public, private 'for profit' and private 'not for profit'.

PNG's government system of training recognises the formal/non-formal distinction with respect to skills development. Technical Colleges (TCs) cater for the formal sector while Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) cater for the non-formal. The team recommended an easier transition between the two modes of training.

Technical Colleges

There has been a major deterioration in the capacity and standard of technical education in PNG (ILO-ARTEP, 1993). Spokespersons from government, commerce and industry were unanimous in their condemnation of the quality of TC programs and their lack of relevance to the needs of employers. On the one hand only 7 percent of the demand for full time places is satisfied. On the other there is evidence that many graduates do not obtain employment in their areas of study, which could be an argument that TCs are providing an oversupply of courses irrelevant to market demand. The team urged that a few TCs should be developed as centres of excellence called Technical Education Development Centres. These would be responsible for technical teacher training, curriculum development, trade testing and certification, and research, and would have board membership that would pay attention to demand as well as supply.

Several successful industry specific training institutions operating with private sector involvement already exist, in some cases with a high degree of financial independence. The team recommended that Industry Training Centres should be established in cooperation with industry associations to be more demand responsive. in skills development. The same approach should be adopted in the agriculture sector, in the first instance with a donor supported pilot project. There is scope for initiatives to involve the private sector in rural extension training, with cost sharing by Government.

Vocational Technical Centres

Most of the 110 registered and 17 permitted private VTCs in PNG, many operated by the churches, are poorly equipped in terms of buildings, facilities and equipment and fail to provide training which matches the needs of their students. A large number appear to be de-facto employment agencies supplying cheap labour over extended periods of work experience. Women are underrepresented, accounting for 31 percent of the total enrolment in 1996. The team recommended that the core business of most VTCs should be directed against unemployment through training in any skills that will generate self-employment and income in the non-formal sector. One VTC in each province should be upgraded to become a Technical Training Assessment Centre, which would ensure uniformity of skills assessment and provide a link between the formal and non-formal training structures.

VTCs should be community led, ensuring that training is appropriate to meeting community needs through a reduction in unemployment and poverty, an increase in opportunity for disadvantaged groups, and a retention of young people at the level of the village.

The team recommended that the governing Councils of both TCs and VTCs be given greater autonomy, with stronger representation from business, NGOs and, in the case of VTCs, local community groups. The primary objectives would be to make training more demand responsive, to ensure staff are more accountable to the communities they serve, and to encourage a more flexible approach to funding (eg through commercial activities) and public/private collaboration.

The team supported the 1997 recommendations made on governance by the report of the National Technical and Vocational Training Committee, *According to their Talents*, to bring together the functions of several existing institutions under a National Training Authority with a well-resourced secretariat. The Authority would introduce a National Qualifications Framework, set up representative Industry Training Boards, give greater emphasis to competency based training, encourage competition between public and private institutions, and involve business, churches and other NGOs much more closely in planning, formulating policies and setting priorities.

Other recommendations related to the encouragement of the participation of women in a wider range of opportunities, financial self-sufficiency through program and performance budgeting techniques and the development of customised training and fee-for-service, and increasing the quality and quantity of TVET.

Non-formal VET

Churches and Other NGOs

A recurrent theme in consultations across the country was the contribution that churches and other NGOs are already making to developing skills and employment opportunities, especially in rural areas and urban settlements, and their potential to make an even greater contribution. Churches/NGOs productively employ large numbers of Papua New Guineans in their structures, education institutions and medical facilities, and in every village there is a tremendous commitment of resources to voluntary community activity. Apart from their specific employment training programs like fisheries, forestry, commerce, handicrafts and cash crops, churches/NGOs have diverse capabilities for pursuing a meaningful contribution to nation building, particularly personal skills and confidence development. Roles undertaken by Churches/NGOs include:

- identification of client needs, and taking rapid decisions on how to respond effectively to them using community-based training
- community mobilisation, encouraging development of appropriate community organisation and capacity building through direct promotion of community-based participation, network support and gender equity
- awareness raising and communication using organisational materials in national languages
- delivery of Government and aid agency programs and services through community-based extension at a relatively lower cost than that of Government
- use of external volunteers for self-employment, income generation and skills development projects in rural and urban areas
- information and applied research of relevance to local needs and conditions

- innovation, based on monitoring, evaluation and freedom to experiment
- mediation, conflict resolution, facilitation, negotiation and counseling
- policy analysis and advocacy
- alternative sustainable development of natural resources for self-employment and skills development.

Although not all NGOs have capacity in skills development in all these areas, Church and other NGO partnerships and coalitions are able to exercise these functions collectively. Such coalitions can complement areas of weakness in Government and provide a vehicle through which planning and implementation processes can ensure that the best skills and competencies are used for employment and skills development, especially at the local and non formal levels. In this context Churches/NGOs can:

- help bring a greater diversity of approaches and community-level insights to complex problems
- draw attention to the rights and needs of groups on the margins of society, and
- help make Government responsive and accountable to groups that lack influence in decision making.

GPNG has declared its desire to work more closely with NGOs in a wide range of activities. It has proposed setting up an NGO Advisory Board that would give churches/NGOs a much greater role in Government decision making. In addition churches/NGOs have sought to share power through representation on national, provincial and district government committees.

If GPNG is to channel the delivery of an increasing range of services, including community-level skills development, through churches/NGOs, it will need a system of NGO registration and formal procedures to ensure accountability and performance. A key challenge for Government is to work with agencies to ensure they are adequately equipped with buildings and facilities. Churches/NGOs also need to strengthen their management capacity through formal training, with Government and donor assistance. The team recommended improved dissemination of information through NGOs, particularly in those areas where Government services are lacking, and research support into the prospects of using natural resources to generate incomes and better farming techniques.

Women

There has been steady progress toward the objective set out in the Constitution of PNG that emphasises 'equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities'. Nevertheless, reports consistently draw attention to the disadvantages of PNG women in comparison with those from other countries classified by the UNDP as having low human development (see for example, UNDP/ILO, 1993). High illiteracy rates, poor transport infrastructure, and health and nutrition problems seriously limit women's capacity to participate actively in employment and skills development at every level. Traditional culture, including the exercise of male dominance through wife beating, and law and order problems involving rape and assault, are frequently cited as a major reason for women's limited progress. Randell (1998) has detailed the outcomes of discussions with women and women's groups in 11 provinces to identify attempts to improve the status of women in employment, training and education over the last decade. Major implementation constraints are identified and ways forward are suggested.

There is still much to be done in the areas of basic education and skills development for women. This is necessary both in the interests of equity and to make fuller use of a valuable national resource – the productive potential of PNG's female population.

Youth

Substantial numbers of young people not at school at the time of the 1990 Census had had no schooling at all (50 percent male and 55 percent female), and only 2.2 percent of young men and one percent of young women were still at school beyond Grade 10. Only 10 000 of the estimated 50 000 young people who graduate from or leave school each year are absorbed into the formal sector. Few of the other 40 000 young men and women pushed out of community and secondary schools can productively apply themselves to employment in the non-formal workforce and community life. The education system has not only failed to provide basic schooling for all children, it has failed to give the majority of school leavers the basic skills needed to make them eligible for formal or even non-formal sector employment. Furthermore, it has contributed to creating false expectations for the young people who are enrolled in schools and their families. Under-employment and dissatisfaction, often expressed in regular social and criminal disturbances, which have been established problems in the urban sector for many years, are increasingly evident in the rural areas. The magnitude of the problem of unemployed young people demands a concerted effort from government and non-government agencies.

GPNG has established a National Youth Service based on the national goals and objectives of rural development, self-reliance, self-employment, self-help, participation and advancement. It aims to achieve these goals and objectives by:

- training youth in specific vocation/livelihood skills and disciplines
- promoting self-reliance among youth and the community, making use of available local resources and discouraging the mentality of demanding free government hand-outs
- linking youth into community development activities to enhance the quality of life of the community and the nation at large
- getting youth to contribute actively towards the maintenance of law and order
- assisting and encouraging youth to further their education through distance education
- ensuring that tertiary students provide voluntary services to the community
- assisting youth to attain satisfactory levels of competency in numerical and communication skills
- maintaining and promoting among youth acceptable social values and norms consistent with society's expectations.

The main emphasis of the Government's activities is to re-establish, reorganise and strengthen the youth development networks. Broadly representative Provincial Youth Federations are to be established under the umbrella of the National Youth Council. The team supported these initiatives and made the following recommendations arising from their discussions with the National Youth Service, NGOs, youth and youth organisations in 11 provinces and surveys across the country.

Implement GPNG policy. Excellent youth policy already exists in the 1997 National Youth Policy. It should be underpinned by legislation and implemented with adequate funding, personnel, training and facilities, giving priority to completing the National Youth Development

Plan 1998-2002. In particular, administrative backup for youth delivery mechanisms is needed at provincial and district levels. Improved planning, coordination and monitoring of youth programs could be achieved by reducing compartmentalisation and providing appropriate support to the National Youth Council through the Department of Home Affairs.

Develop leadership and management capacity. Youth expressed the strong desire to be participants, partners, decision makers, managers, leaders and coaches in youth activities. They requested in-country training in management skills at national, district, and provincial levels.

Create partnerships. Many groups and individuals consulted strongly recommended the creation of partnerships between GPNG, churches and other NGOs, some of which have a long record of successful youth programs that could help to channel youthful energy into productive self-employment and work for the benefit of communities. The productivity of private youth development centres at the non-formal level could be increased with additional financial and technical support. Similarly, partnerships between GPNG and business and industry could stimulate concomitant market driven arrangements. The formation of Provincial Youth Federations could assist in this strategy.

Share power and decision making. To enable young people to be heard and have some influence on decision making it was suggested that targets be set for youth-appointed membership on provincial and local governments and on government and other bodies.

Review curriculum. One of the most effective ways for Government to contribute to youth development, besides increasing retention beyond Year 10, would be through a general revision of the school curriculum at all levels of formal schooling. This must become more relevant to lifelong learning and to encouraging self reliance and participation in the rural economy and non-formal activities. Suggestions were made that education should be agriculture-based, and teach life skills and economic development. Funding for church/NGO projects and youth development centres would assist non-formal education.

Conduct research. Data on youth participation in training and skills development and in economic projects should be collected to inform planning. Several topics for further research were advocated, including youth participation in training, skills development and economic development; business opportunities that could be useful for young people, for example, cottage industries, food processing, marketing, agriculture, fishing; and ways of increasing self-reliant income generation.

Disseminate information. Using church and other NGO networks could improve dissemination of information about skills development and credit opportunities and improve the status of youth in the community at village level.

Extend credit schemes. The team saw some examples of successful youth involvement in credit schemes, but several projects had failed. It was suggested that the Youth Mini-Credit Scheme could be reactivated, following a review of the reasons for its limited success in the past. More effective monitoring, advisory support, training in entrepreneurial development and skills in income-generating activities for youth and youth groups were advocated. Savings and loans schemes for youth were also suggested.

Establish a Youth Foundation. The initiative of the National Youth Service to establish a National Youth Foundation was supported. This would provide the opportunity for youth to work as volunteers in PNG but also in other Pacific countries.

At a Policy Development Workshop held at the end of October, Lady Carol Kidu MP reminded participants that ‘too often when we talk about young people we treat them as a problem. Rather, we should recognise their innate abilities and energy as a national asset’. The youth discussion group at this national workshop concluded that ‘It is clear that there needs to be mobilisation of *real* government support through resources, both funding and personnel and legislative backing’. The majority of young people interviewed for the study did not wish to be spoon-fed. They desire and demand skills training that they can utilise socially and apply economically for their own meaningful living.

Investment in Skills Development

The team estimated that about 10 percent of the country’s GDP is invested in skills development if general education is included. Government is the biggest investor, followed by business, with a small monetary contribution from Churches and other NGOs. This level of investment is not low by international standards. Yet it appears that the returns to this investment are not as high as they should be. The social profitability of investment in skills development appears to be eroded by:

- high ‘drop-out’ rates which prevent many students, at all levels of the system, from achieving levels of competence which justify the investment made in their early, truncated training
- high costs imposed by the small scale of education and training establishments and the present under-utilisation of facilities and staff
- the difficulty of ‘catching up’ while simultaneously trying to meet the needs of a fast-growing population, contributing to a generally poor standard of teaching by an under-qualified and under-resourced teaching profession.
- in the rural areas particularly, cultural and logistical constraints to the translation of skills into economic benefits
- weak linkage between employers in the formal private sector and public sector providers of training, resulting in a low level of demand-responsiveness and a mismatch between supply and demand with respect to skills
- an uneasy relationship between GPNG and NGOs, and among NGOs themselves, which has hampered the development of NGOs’ capability to provide training in areas where they would appear to be better suited than Government
- inefficient distribution of funds for skills development by Government.

The last issue is one that can be immediately addressed, and the team recommended that whether funds for non-formal skills development originate from Government or donors they should be channeled mainly through the churches and other NGOs, which are better equipped to understand community needs and work with local groups. As far as possible though, such support should also be on a contractual basis with full accountability by NGOs for service delivery.

Conclusion

The current willingness of the private sector – business, churches/NGOs and individuals - to invest in skills development is an encouraging first step in PNG facing the challenges of education in the 21st century. More productive partnerships between public and private sectors are clearly called for. These partnerships in PNG could be useful models for the Asia Pacific region. Investment in skills development of women and youth through non-formal education strategies will also be critical to the future wellbeing of countries across the region.

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