
This review examines the three phases of BELS (Basic Education and Life Skills) since its implementation in 1993. It is not a formal evaluation of the programme, rather a qualitative survey of how the programme has been implemented, and the changes that have taken place in its duration. Information and material were collected from project and evaluations, programme reports and related documents, as well as extensive interviews of BELS staff, implementing agencies, donors and representatives from participating countries.

The BELS project was launched in 11 participating countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) to improve the quality of basic and primary education. It addressed the various identified problems of grossly inadequate number of well-trained teachers; the high cost of traditional in-service training; difficulty of providing sustained follow-up activities following training; the low status of teachers and their morale; low reading standards in primary schools; inadequate production and distribution of reading materials for schools; lack of balance and relevance of curricula; and inadequate school-community linkages. The project was funded by UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, AusAid and NZODA.

Section Two is an introduction to the twelve participating countries of the region, looking briefly at their social and economic situations, especially in regards to education and youth. This section sets the context for the study. Section Three presents an overview of the programme and its processes. It examines some of the ways the programme has been implemented, noting changes and reasons for the changes. Section Four assesses the outcomes and achievements of the programme as it nears its completion. This includes a description of an impact study in the Solomon Islands and a case study on how Fiji has adopted BELS. Section Five presents an analysis of the constraints and difficulties that the programme has encountered. Issues relating to the project itself as well as issues faced at country level are examined. Section Six looks at the key issue of sustainability. It concludes with universal lessons that might be learned from the BELS programme.