VSO education programmes
Education in PNG

In PNG more than 46% of the population is under the age of 18. Although education is free, many children do not go to school or drop out before completing primary school. Levels of literacy and numeracy are low so the Government of PNG is introducing a new national curriculum to raise standards. The impact of low educational standards is high youth unemployment. Young women and girls are at a particular disadvantage. School enrolment rates for girls relative to boys are amongst the lowest in the Pacific.

VSO’s priorities in education

We believe the priority is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in early childhood, elementary and primary through improving teacher training and curriculum. We work alongside schools, teachers’ colleges, standards officers and provincial divisions of education to improve school management and the teaching of literacy and numeracy. We focus on supporting long-lasting reforms in teacher education and curriculum. VSO looks for innovative research, solutions and collaborations and works closely with the Department of Education. As a long term partner we champion reforms such as phonics, scripted lessons, decodable readers and improved teacher training.

How VSO volunteers improve education in PNG

Our experienced international volunteers share knowledge and skills which are not available locally. Working closely with their PNG colleagues, they identify problems and find practical and sustainable solutions to improve the quality of education in Papua New Guinea.

We do this in a number of ways:

- Providing long term support and professional development for education professionals
- Providing technical advice on improving education quality
- Coaching and mentoring of teachers, lecturers and headteachers
- Managing research
- Role-modelling positive behaviour and project management
- Linking with other NGOs and church education agencies

Impact of VSO volunteers in PNG

In the last twelve months VSO volunteers have been improving teaching and learning in many ways:

- The new Standards Based Curriculum elementary English syllabus, teacher guides, 450 scripted lessons, 120 songs and 26 readers
- Seven new teacher training units for primary English including video lessons and training for over 100 lecturers (www.youtube.com/pngteachingvideos)
- A national review of the elementary teacher training system in PNG (using a phone bank for the first time)
- SMS Story, an innovative research trial of mobile technology to improve reading in remote schools (www.vsointernational.org/Images/sms-story-impact-assessment-report_tcm76-41038.pdf)
- Testing the English proficiency of over 700 elementary teachers using a computerised test in collaboration with the British Council
- Developing national early childhood diploma
- Technical advice to the Prime Minister’s OBE Exit Task Force
- Research on pregnancy in schools, secondary transition, early childhood centres and national exam data analysis
- Support for inclusive education and counselling services

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Our long-term goal is for all children to get a good education
VSO’s support for curriculum and policy reform

VSO has been working for the Department of Education for over fifty years and has supported many of the curriculum and policy reforms. Our volunteers are embedded within the Department of Education and partners to collect and analyse evidence, provide technical advice and support the education goals of the PNG government.

Every Child Reading
Funded by Australia Aid and working within the curriculum division, Every Child Reading developed the new elementary English syllabus and introduced daily scripted lessons to the teacher guides. The three years of daily lesson plans reduce the workload on teachers and improve the teaching of essential skills.

The team also produced a classroom library kit of 25 reading books, flash cards, posters and over 100 songs linked to the new teacher guides. The materials were also produced on micro-SD cards for teachers to use on their mobile phones.

Prime Minister’s Task Force
In response to problems in the education system, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea established a task force to review the curriculum and teacher training system. A VSO volunteer working at the university leading the review was able to provide technical advice to the task force report which is the evidence behind a wide range of planned changes in the education sector.
VSO’s support for inclusive education

Special education
Children with disabilities are often excluded from education. VSO has worked closely with special education resource centres and civil society organisations to improve education services for disabled children and their families.

In recent years, VSO has supported the establishment of a new specialist teacher training college for inclusive education and facilitated the writing of an updated special education teacher training unit for every primary school teacher trainee. Our work is focused on long term impacts.

A vibrant civil society
VSO volunteers have worked as capacity builders with a number of education NGOs including Callan Services for the Disabled and Buk Bilong Pikinini (PNG’s largest provider of early childhood libraries). Volunteers work on improving curriculum, policy and professional development, as well as help with the growth of the organisations.

Health and gender
VSO education volunteers also link with our health and gender work to ensure anti-violence and positive gender messages are included in new policy and curriculum. Volunteers working in schools were instrumental in the roll-out of the National Behaviour Management Policy, PNG’s first child rights based policy. In addition, we work closely with the Department of Education on many health resources and we have a VSO volunteer supporting the school counsellor service which helps vulnerable children.

Reproductive sexual health teaching for all
Every new teacher in PNG completes a 30-hour compulsory course on reproductive sexual health and HIV which was written in a participatory way by all teachers’ colleges and facilitated by a VSO volunteer. Over 10,000 primary school teachers have graduated from the course since 2007.
VSO & innovation in education

VSO brings ideas and innovation to the PNG education sector. Based on our long service in the country and our deep understanding of its schools, challenges and potential, we are able to trial ideas which improve children’s learning. The needs of the children of PNG are always at the heart of our support to the Department of Education and its partners.

Low cost
As a charity, VSO is committed to low cost solutions and value for money.

1. Conducting research in PNG is often very expensive. VSO piloted the use of telephone research, interviewing hundreds of teachers in remote schools. This was significantly cheaper than flying to provinces to conduct the research.

2. Rather than give teachers expensive DVDs or internet access, VSO provides micro-SD cards containing all the teacher training videos, resources and songs. Teachers use their own mobile phones to access the latest resources.

3. A VSO volunteer graphic designer helped the Department of Education re-create its old reading books and school journals. As these are copyright free, they are cheaper than commercial books for schools.

Teaching and learning
VSO is committed to improving the standard of teaching in elementary and primary schools.

1. VSO has promoted the use of phonics in the teaching of English, building extensive field experience in what works best in PNG schools and then integrating this learning into the new national curriculum.

2. We have also led the introduction of daily scripted lessons to improve consistency of teaching and reduce the burden on teachers who have little training. Again, this was based on field trials in real schools.

3. At the teachers’ colleges we introduced the use of teacher training videos to show new teaching strategies and allow student teachers to see good teachers teaching.
VSO’s support for education research

VSO has a long history of education research in Papua New Guinea. Policy makers at the Department of Education and institutions increasingly demand data and analysis for decision making.

VSO also builds monitoring and evaluation into all its projects, establishing baseline and conducting impact assessments. In recent years we have managed both controlled trials and big data projects.

Our volunteers collaborate with young PNG researchers, building their capacity and skills, to ensure a strong cadre of education researchers for the future.

SMS Story
In 2013 VSO managed a controlled research trial to see whether sending a daily text message story and lesson plan to elementary teachers improved children’s reading. This low cost and simple system significantly improved children’s reading skills. It is very appropriate for PNG and other countries with many remote elementary schools.

Grade 8 exam analysis
In 2014 VSO was commissioned by the Department of Education to collect and analyse three years of grade 8 exam data for every child and every school in PNG. VSO recruited a group of young researchers and managed this huge exercise successfully, providing the Department with the first primary school level comparison of exam performance.

What do you want to find out?
VSO has managed these research projects in recent years:

- Early grade reading assessment (EGRA)
- Elementary teacher and trainer national phone survey
- Pregnancy and dormitory life survey
- Early childhood facility survey
- Capacity needs analysis of the national education system
- English proficiency testing of elementary teachers
- Tracer studies of new graduate teachers
- Analysis of the teacher leave fares system
Teacher education is a priority for VSO in Papua New Guinea. VSO volunteers have supported improvements in teacher training in elementary, primary and secondary teacher training.

Historically, VSO has worked with provinces and schools to improve the implementation of new curriculum and resources. We have also supported new course development for the pre-service training of secondary school teachers.

Currently our focus is elementary and primary pre-service teacher training. VSO has experienced volunteers at teacher’s colleges and universities working with PNG colleagues on new teacher training units. This includes national workshops, professional development and the production of resources and teacher training videos.

In addition, we are involved in the reform of elementary teacher training, managing a major policy review and supporting new elementary units. This complements our support for early childhood education where our volunteers supported the first national diploma, national standards and the largest NGO provider of early childhood education.

Research
VSO volunteers work with the Department of Education on research and policy advice for teacher education. This has included tracer studies of student teachers and large scale telephone surveys of elementary teachers and trainers.

In 2013, VSO worked with the British Council to assess the level of English skills proficiency among elementary teachers. We have also been instrumental in introducing entry testing into teachers’ colleges.

Language Support Programme (2012 - 2014)
VSO volunteers worked at the primary teachers’ colleges to help improve teacher training in English. This included a major redevelopment of seven core units, writing of new assessment tasks, over twenty teacher training videos and national conferences and workshops. Student teachers received their resources on microSD card and printed copies. For maximum sustainability all colleges were involved in writing and trialling the new units. Every student teacher in PNG will be using these new units from 2015.
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