

KNOW-HOW
3000

Experience

IN DETAIL

„Flexible Learning for Regional Development of Human Resources”



HORIZONT
3000

AUSTRIAN ORGANISATION
FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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List of Abbreviations

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
DKA	Dreikönigsaktion (Development Cooperation Agency of the Catholic Children's Movement of Austria)
DWU	Divine Word University

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¹ DKA Austria - Development Cooperation Agency of the Catholic Children's Movement of Austria, Catholic Men's Movement of Austria – KMBÖ, Catholic Women's Movement of Austria – kfbö, Caritas Austria, Department for mission and development of the Archdiocese of Vienna, Welthaus Diocese Graz-Seckau, Brother and Sister in Need – Diocese of Innsbruck, Brother and Sister in Need - Catholic Action Carinthia

1. General Information

The “Divine Word University” (DWU) is a national university in Madang, Papua New Guinea, open to all, serving society through its quality of research, teaching, learning and community engagement in a Christian environment. DWU is a leading University in PNG, with faculties of Arts, Business and Informatics, Education and Health, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs full time or through flexible learning. The DWU is a public, government-supported ecumenical and coeducational university that is privately administered. Its primary purpose is to serve national goals. With support, partnership and collaboration from both public and private organizations, DWU commits itself to offer special training programs in response to current and emerging needs of Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. DWU’s services are offered with a high level of ethics and respect of individual rights.

The University's Vision (DWU) is achieved through:

- A Christian presence in an academic environment.
- Standards of excellence in teaching and research for all students and staff.
- Emphasis on the development of moral and ethical behavior in public, private and professional life based on Christian values.
- Dedication to social justice and offering equal opportunity to all.
- Ecumenical acceptance of all students and staff without regard to race and religion who respect the university’s vision.
- Continuous dialogue and partnership with all levels of community, business, government and culture in the life and work of the University.
- Quality academic programs relevant to the needs of students and society.
- Providing an authentic model for national unity.

Within this documentation, the DWU, the Catholic Education Agency of Bougainville, situated in Buka, Autonomous Region of Bougainville and the regional office of HORIZONT3000 in PNG want to present the experience named “Flexible Learning for Regional Development of Human Resources”, in order to increase the management capacity

of the sectors education and health as well as church/ government social services by training a significant number of managers in charge. In Bougainville the experience has been carried out in since 2007.



Chart 1 Localization of the experience

2. Context of the Experience

Both sectors education and health are relatively well funded in PNG, but have limited management capacities. Typically head-teachers and sisters-in-charge of a health centre are promoted to that position after years of service as a teacher or nurse, but receive little preparation for their new role. Accountability and reporting of funds is therefore low. Misuse – often involuntarily due to lack of skills – is common.

Unfortunately, no training institutions for such purposes exist. Universities in PNG are concentrated in a view cities, and no Teacher College or other institution of higher education does exist in Bougainville. Additionally, head teachers, government and church workers are in employment and cannot leave their duties for long. Therefore, the need to increase the management capacity of the health as well as education sector rose.

In 2006 the Catholic Education Agency of Bougainville and DWU agreed to offer a donor funded human resource management course. Over the years educational leadership and health management courses were organised as well. The courses were organised by various HORIZONT3000 development workers.

Funding agencies over time were Cordaid (Cordaid), Caritas Australia (Caritas Australia), PNG Sustainable Development Program, European Union/ DKA (DKA)/ ADA (ADA). Similar agreements were done between DWU

and other agencies – e.g. there were successful teacher upgrade courses in Nauru.

“Gender” was an important aspect since the beginning of the experience. The attempt was made by the Catholic Education Agency to give equal opportunities to women in leadership roles or to bring equal numbers of women in such roles. The first course had a 40% quota of female participants, later a distribution of 50% was targeted.

3. Main Characteristics of the Experience

After the program became known, interest in flexible tertiary education increased, and selection became easier, because interested teachers and church workers proactively approached the office with education requests. A high demand by teachers and church workers to offer additional courses speaks for a program that meets the need of the target group.

Main tools and instruments to realize the experience, besides the provision of courses (4 semesters x 2 weeks each), were:

- Job-based assignments/ homework based on challenges of the student’s work environment: Working groups and job-based assignments allow courses to be tailored to the needs of the participants.
- Mentoring and tutoring: different approaches were tried such as personal mentors and mentoring and support by the organisation team in order to help the participants tackle assignment tasks. As many participants are not used to tertiary learning they need to be motivated and pushed a bit here and there. In some cases study groups outside of the courses also led to positive group dynamics and a mutual support among students.

To a certain degree courses can be customised to the participants needs. DWU offers a range of courses. All courses are a combination of one week or half-week modules, some of which can be used for different groups or courses. Also assignments are generally based on the job of the participant – and thus are always customised to their needs. Major customisations and changes need to be approved by the university council.

4. Stakeholders and Partners – Roles and Responsibilities

There are various groups that are benefitting from the experience in Bougainville such as:

- Teachers and head teachers
- Nurses and “sister in charge” of mostly rural health centres
- Traditional healers
- Priests (in remote areas priests are often the only people on this level of formal education – they are important development actors and responsible for schools, health and a range of other development activities) and church workers
- Staff of the provincial government (education and health sector), church administration and social ministries (health agency, education agency, catholic women group and other social services/ ministries).

Among Flexible Learning Students in general can be public servants, managers, accountants, HR staff, health and education staff.

In addition, the following institutions are mainly involved in the experience:

- HORIZONT3000 development workers, who mostly organised the courses or oversaw their organisation.
- The Catholic Education Agency, whose interest is to improve the capacity of their own teachers, and that of their partners (e.g. government agency workers, school inspectors and administrators) as well as other church staff.
- The Divine Word University, who initially wanted to contribute to peace building and re-building the society in Bougainville after the civil war (“*The Bougainville Crisis*”). The first course was therefore subsidised by DWU and made a loss for them. By time, the courses also contributed to the income of the university. The provision of tertiary education is the core business of DWU – those courses help to build the reputation of DWU in Bougainville (e.g. Bougainville government departments now use DWU for their capacity building). Moreover, many DWU lecturers are personally interested in experiencing post-war Bougainville and consequently seek to come to Bougainville.

5. Resources

In order to carry out the practice in a successful way, some resources are needed:

- Human Resources including qualified lecturers
- Time, such as time of the lecturers to lecture and proof-read assignments, time of the management-team, which is approximately four months full time work for one person on the ground over the course of a diploma course of two years.
- Financial resources: For achieving impact, donor funding enables a more targeted selection of participants and ensures that no one needs to opt out of the course due to otherwise frequent school fee problems.
- Course materials, that need to be designed, and course methodology, that is not limited to frontal teaching allowing experienced students to contribute their experiences and knowledge and permitting them to directly apply the learnings into their day-to-day-job-life.

6. Impact of the Experience

The “Flexible Learning experience” was used in order to address the MDGs in the areas of education and health:

Relating to the MDG Number 2 “to achieve universal primary education”, it can be stated that in order to minimize the non-attendance of students and teachers, the respective management was addressed by the Flexible Learning diploma courses “Human Resource Management” and “School Leadership and Management”. Nevertheless, low literacy, low knowledge of the English-language, and low numeracy skills after primary school remain some pressing issues.

Concerning the MDG Number 4 “to reduce child mortality”, number 5 “to improve maternal health” and Number 6 “to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases”, the bad management of health institutions and of supplies resulted in a lack of trust in the public health system, which were/ are both addressed by the “Health Management” and “Human Resource Management” courses. The capacity of the health staff (as to both skills and number of staff available) are the current issue of concern.

As to the general impact on organisational level (e.g. school-level), participants reported the use of particular tools learned during the program (e.g. planning or conflict resolution). As far as the impact on Bougainville regional level is concerned, for every four primary schools or every two health centres there is now at least one person with formal leadership/management qualification. Additionally, a number of traditional health clinics were initiated after the experience.

7. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Flexible Learning Education seems to be attractive to donor agencies – which makes it a good tool to organise capacity building almost anywhere. Donor funding further helps to achieve sector-wide impact, as students do not drop out throughout the four semesters and complete their studies. Nevertheless, flexible learning courses need good on-the-ground networking and management of assignments and courses. If this does not work well, the quality of the courses deteriorates.

Participants struggle with the assignments, so spaces have to be created, either at night or after the 2-week-course is over, in order to help them complete and discuss their assignments with peers.

Concerning the individual contributions to the course-costs (“school fee”) it can be stated that initially participants are highly motivated and can pay significant course fees, but this ability goes down due to either motivation or financial problems which they experience along the way. Therefore, it is better to collect all course contributions before the two-year program starts, even if the amount is substantial, as PNG teachers receive regular salary and have access to education loans.

8. Challenges

Nevertheless, there also remain some challenges when applying the practice:

- Time and resources for assignments: Many participants/ students find it hard to complete their assignments in time, since they are also working full time and have

little resources in their remote places of work. Most work in rural areas with no electricity and no computers, which makes it hard to complete their assignments.

- Low literacy level and independent reading skills of the students: Many students or even teachers find it difficult to independently work through scientific texts, mainly because of English language skills and little reading experience outside of school, specifically if technical terminology.
- Course management: Course materials were often delivered late, due to short-notice-changes of course dates or lecturers not showing up at all.
- Assignment management: Assignments were lost by DWU.
- School fees: The regular flexible learning diploma program requires 4 semester payments of K3.000,- (approx. 3 months' pay for a headteacher) plus travel costs. Self-sponsoring students mostly cannot keep up the level of financial commitment over 2 years (e.g. because unplanned family commitments arise). Often not even half of the initial group graduate. Therefore any school fee or individual course contribution needs to be collected in advance.

So far these challenges have been addressed by the following measures:

- Course management: One person with organisational skills needs to be responsible "on the ground" – where this was the case, experience was good.
- Assignment management: Lost assignments can be mitigated by good follow-up by either DWU office staff or on-the-ground church agency.
- Resources of students: Students were encouraged to buy their own laptops to enable them to work more independently. Computers for public use were only being provided by the education agency in Arawa and Buka.
- School fees: In Bougainville donor funding ensured that usually 20 out of 25 graduated. Gradually student's own contribution was increased, but had to be collected in the first two semesters.

9. Sustainability

Some elements are required that need to be in place, for the practice to be institutionally, and economically sustainable. While training provision via Flexible Learning mode itself constitutes an income earning possibility for the university, a "management unit", either a branch of the university or a local agency, needs to be responsible, provide computers and training facilities (in Buka this was done by the Catholic Education Agency) or a local university campus is established. Also a "funding modus" needs to be found - either donor funding, or a model where employers or participants pay individually.

10. Experience Sharing/ Up-scaling

In order to be able to replicate the experience some conditions need to be guaranteed:

- A (tertiary) institution/ university as course provider and a local agency with spare man-power to support the implementation "on the ground" is needed.
- Support and goodwill of the relevant government agency is required. At least in PNG teachers and nurses need to be released from duty during the time of the courses.
- Funding support by a reliable donor, if a donor funded approach is chosen, otherwise sufficient purchasing power of the participants themselves is needed, if they need to pay for their courses.
- Access to electricity, computers and/ or course venues is needed.
- Concerning the travel costs, in most countries and provinces bringing the university lecturers into the remote location will be cheaper than bringing all participants to the university. But this means that lecturers need to be willing enough to travel, and the courses need to be designed in a way that this is possible.
- As to social conditions, a peaceful course environment is crucial.

Described experience could be relevant for church and government education agencies, education support programs, and tertiary institutions wishing to offer courses in distance learning mode.

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