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CAN FISHERIES TRAINING BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE?

(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

1. The aim of this paper is to encourage discussion on the training undertaken by Pacific Island fisheries personnel with the purpose of exploring ways of improving the effectiveness of that training.

2. An SPC paper entitled "Fisheries Training in the Pacific Islands - Problems and Perspectives" was presented to the 18th Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries in 1986. The problems and perspectives outlined in that paper are summarised as follows:

a. There is a large and diverse amount of training easily available to Pacific Island fisheries personnel.

b. Staff training records from most Pacific countries indicate that fisheries staff have undertaken a significant amount of training in a broad range of subjects, both within the region and on overseas courses.

c. It is considered, for a variety of reasons, that course participants are often poorly selected and because of this do not get the full benefit from the particular courses they attend.

d. Few countries have developed long-term staff training regimes which are integrated with other sections of their department, and staff training is often conducted on an ad hoc, whatever is available, basis.

e. Some trainees are not subsequently putting into practice the skills they have learnt on their training course.

f. There is a perception in some areas that overseas courses are better than national courses. (This does not reflect the view of the SPC).

g. Many countries are developing their own training capabilities and this is strongly encouraged. The paper pointed out that several countries, after establishing in-country training or training establishments, then sought to extend this training to a regional level (perhaps for funding reasons), and the paper indicated that it considered a proliferation of "regional training centres" would not benefit either the region or, ultimately, the individual establishments themselves.

h. There is a need for better communication between all existing training establishments, both inside and outside the region, and between these institutions and all sectors of the fishing industry within the region. There is a strong case for the establishment of a regional meeting or council which would co-ordinate and rationalise the regional input of training bodies to ensure courses are relevant and to avoid duplication.

3. An examination of the information gained during the SPC survey of regional training opportunities and country training needs has indicated that many of these points are still valid to a greater or lesser degree. Continuing country visits and the experience gained from running several regional training courses have further emphasised aspects which need consideration if the training offered to the region is to be improved. The most significant aspect of the survey, which included follow-up evaluation of how students were performing when they returned home, was the large number of people who were not practising the skills and knowledge they gained during their training courses despite being employed in areas directly related to these skills. Examination of records show that staff are often sent to what are in effect repeat courses which have a very similar content to courses previously attended. Even after attending in-depth courses it has been reported that some staff either do not have the confidence or the knowledge to put what they have learnt into practice.

4. If training is less effective than expected, the reasons for this should be addressed even though some of them may be unpalatable and the following possibilities are presented as a basis for discussion. It should be noted that all of the ideas presented in this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the SPC but reflect attitudes or ideas which have been expressed during the survey and other training exercises.

**A. Courses may be badly organised or executed.**

5. This is the obvious reason for persons not being able to do what they are supposed to do after attending a training course, and there is little doubt that this is the case with some courses and even institutions. Running effective training courses and training institutions is not an easy job. Fishing schools all over the world find difficulty in recruiting experienced and qualified staff with good practical experience in general fishing subjects who also have the ability to teach these subjects in a practical way. The base for recruiting tutors with expertise in Pacific fishing is relatively small and it is possible that conditions of service are not attracting top personnel who seek employment in areas other than education or training.

6. Although many of the courses which are run outside of the region may not directly fall into the inefficient category from the point of view of resources and tutors, they may do so indirectly. In particular, many courses are not specifically designed for Pacific Islanders but for "overseas students" with Pacific Island students being only part of the class. The course contents are often of a general nature and not directly relevant to island fisheries, or else may be presented in a manner to which the student cannot relate. A very frequent comment from students who have attended courses in some overseas countries is that they cannot understand the accented English of the tutors.

7. The solution to this problem is not easy, nor will it be made easier by a proliferation of regional training centers which further strain the available manpower and funding resources. The situation will not be helped by continuing to send students to courses which are not particularly effective, or by the lack of evaluation and follow-up (para 27). **Sending students to poor courses only perpetuates their existence to the detriment of the better courses.**

**B. Courses not relevant to the Pacific situation.**

8. This has partially been discussed in the previous section. Most general courses, which includes university courses, contain parts which the student will seldom use. This is unavoidable when a rounded education covering a large subject area is desired. However, outside of these general courses, many students are sent to courses of a specific nature from which they do not benefit. This can be due to inappropriate selection of students or result from bad liaison between the fisheries department and the college or institution running the course. There are few recorded instances of Fisheries Departments writing to institutions asking them to change specific course syllabus to suit the needs of that country's candidates.

9. Course contents should be examined thoroughly and if they do not suit national requirements, requests should be made to have them altered. If the institution is not willing to do this, no more students should be sent to that course.

**C. Too many courses are being offered.**

10. Many departments complain about the number of courses being offered to them. They feel pressure, perhaps out of politeness, loyalty or other reasons, to send staff to the courses even though their absence puts strain on the every day operation of the department. There still exists, as indicated in the previous paper, a need for the various training establishments and bodies offering training to get together to effect some sort of rationalisation. However the large number of training opportunities offered and the diversity of sources and subjects would make this difficult to implement and the diversity of interests make it unlikely that any of these bodies would wish to significantly modify their training programmes.

The other obvious solution as previously stated is not to send students to courses which do not exactly fit individual staff or country needs.

**D. Poor selection of candidates.**

11. This was well covered in the 1986 paper and it is not intended to go into the various reasons listed in that paper for poor selection but rather following from the previous section, where too many courses are being offered, to highlight the difficulty which is experienced by busy senior staff in deciding what a particular course is intended to achieve and which of their staff, if any, the course would benefit or has in fact been designed for. Any institution presenting a course of study, whether it be three months or 12 months should be able to indicate in simple but precise terms what

skills or educational benefits a participant from that specific country will obtain from attending the course. Unfortunately course contents are too often presented either in very general, esoteric terms or in the form of a complicated course prescription so that making a decision as to its relevance to particular staff members is not a simple matter. Regardless, care must be taken by the persons responsible for selecting staff for particular courses to ensure they understand the course contents and intent thoroughly, otherwise it is more than likely they will make poor selections.

#### **E. Difficulty in relating what is learnt to what is done.**

12. This may be a significant reason for students not performing after their return from overseas courses; they do not see the direct relationship between what they have learnt and what they are actually doing in their job. It is possible that this starts during early schooling where children learn subjects which have little relevance to their home environment and although this happens to children throughout the world it is possibly more significant where the home environment is of a rural or less developed nature. If the attitude of "what we learn at school does not concern us at home," is developed at an early age it will probably follow through to advanced education where the subject matter is more complex and perhaps more conceptual. Knowledge gained at tertiary educational establishments, especially overseas in a different environment, on a scale and situation outside of the home environment, is more easily pigeonholed as academic, not relevant to 'real life' so that on return this information is put aside in a "learning pigeon hole", and not put into practice as a thing to actually do.

13. It has been noted that some of the skills which are least practised on course return, lie in mechanical areas. A reason illustrating why this may occur was given by a student studying diesel mechanics at an overseas fisheries officer course, who pointed out that participants from developed countries, who had been brought up with mechanical toys, devices and engines from an early age, had a distinct advantage in this area over others who had not been introduced to machines until their adult years.

14. Two questions, which should be asked are "How do Pacific Islanders learn?" and "Are the Western teaching methods which are standard within the Pacific actually the best methods for teaching Pacific Islanders?" If the answer to the second question is no, then most of the courses which students are currently attending cannot be totally suitable and need to be rethought.

15. During the SPC survey, several persons considered they had benefitted from having their university education under the auspices of the University of the South Pacific because the university was more able to present the subjects in a way which was acceptable to them, and they felt at home with their fellow students. This is quite different from another point of view which said that overseas courses were officially higher regarded, and that the better students were sent to overseas universities while the others were sent to USP.

16. The situation discussed in this section is complex but in all situations it can be overcome by more appropriate teaching of a better standard. The SPC's view is that every attempt should be made to conduct courses within the region, or where possible within country, using national or regional trainers, environments and working examples. Nevertheless, care

should be taken to maintain the calibre of the training, and regionalism should not be pushed ahead of effectiveness. It is unfortunate but it should be recognised that due to lack of opportunity and experience, some regional trainers are only able to paraphrase the same learning they were given during their own training. Every effort should be made to give them the opportunity to expand their practical and teaching experience.

**F. Social reasons limit the effectiveness of training.**

17. It is possible that some people are not being encouraged to put what they have learnt into practice because it is not socially acceptable. An example of this might be where someone who has attended and performed well at a course in the management of a small fish processing operation does not succeed in running a similar operation when he returns home. The reason for this may not be that he does not know what to do, but that he finds it very difficult to put what he knows into practice because of pressures from others. It may not be acceptable for him to tell others what to do or to reprimand them, especially if they are socially superior or perhaps older.

18. Several cases have been reported of students returning to supervisory or business situations and failing due to pressure from family and friends seeking employment or benefits. This no doubt occurs in all cultures but it is possible that Pacific Islanders find it harder to say no. Faced with these various influences the individual finds it easier to drift along doing what is expected rather than to put into practice what he knows to be technically correct. The ideas expressed in this section are not meant to reflect adversely on the social practices of either the participants themselves or their countries but rather to question the way this type of course is being presented. The ideas given in the courses may not be appropriate or apply to Pacific Island cultures and situations and it may be necessary to restructure the course to ensure that it is orientated to take into account the home environment and social mores of the participants.

19. As well as inherent talent, culture and traditional influences play a large part in deciding which kind of career path a person chooses. In the Pacific this, combined with a slower development in technology due to isolation and to small country size and population, has probably influenced more persons to seek education or training in what might broadly be called the social sciences with law and political science being more esteemed professions. The executive branches of most government departments are more highly paid than the technical departments, through junior to senior grades. It is from the executive branches that department heads are recruited. Also many governments have regulations whereby senior positions can only be filled by degree holders and less senior positions by diploma holders, etc., having no provision for the possibility of promotion through the ranks by merit or job experience.

20. All of these points influence the clever or ambitious person to adopt academic or administrative careers rather than technical careers. It is this, rather than the lack of natural aptitude or ability which is causing a shortage of competent technicians including mechanics and engineers. This shortage has been sighted as one of the major drawbacks to regional fisheries development. Training by itself will not be able to rectify this as it is largely social and economic in nature.

**G. Departmental reasons.**

21. It has been found that some of the more junior staff members are not trusted, or allowed to implement skills learnt on training courses. This is often because not enough effort has been taken by supervisors to learn what level the trainee has achieved, with the result that further development of these skills on return is ignored. An evaluation of the standard of skills obtained by the student is rarely complete on his return home. It is unfortunate that a situation exists where if either the student has not performed well on the course, or the course has not done its job, or the department has not encouraged the use of these skills to the point where they have been forgotten, then the department can simply send the person to another course. Thus again the over supply of courses is not helping anyone and is indirectly encouraging mediocrity.

22. It is really important that the persons in charge of deciding who goes to training make themselves aware of what training can and cannot achieve. Better training, not just more training, is the answer and should be rigorously pursued by senior fisheries officers.

**H. Training as a reward or as a right.**

23. Many of the fisheries departments of the region have developed their staff complement over a relatively short period of time. During the last 15 years there has been a policy of selecting promising school leavers and putting them through extensive training programmes which usually include overseas courses. The expectations of staff, who receive this early training, to continue to attend overseas courses is high; they obviously enjoy them and wish to continue with them in preference to mundane activities such as work.

24. At some point these programmes cease to become meaningful training exercises and become overseas breaks. It is incumbent on the individuals who are responsible for student selection to take these factors into account even if their decisions are unpopular. At some time a person becomes trained and must put into the country or department what he has obtained from it.

25. The foregoing should not be taken to mean that any person should cease to receive training at any set point in their career. Obviously this must be flexible to suit individual ability and changes in job responsibilities so that ongoing, possibly shorter, specialised or advanced training will always be desirable.

**I. Lack of feedback and evaluation.**

26. Inefficiency and lack of results is encouraged because senior fisheries officers are not giving 'feed back' to training institutions on how relevant the courses are and how the students are performing on their return home. Inefficient courses will not make attempts to improve while they are still being patronised and not being required, or even asked, to improve their standards. The recent Onorio/Shepherd report on the future development of IMR recognised one of the problems of the institute as a lack of communication between the institute, its governing body and the industry it served. Steps

have been taken to alleviate this problem and because of this the Diploma in Tropical Fisheries will become more relevant and will better serve the region. But what about the many other courses and why did the Diploma Course have to have a special consultancy before its problems were addressed?

This is indicative of the ease with which countries can get training and the little effort they put into assuring that training courses are doing what they should. From within countries and from many of the organisations and institutions themselves there is no evaluation or follow-up of how effective training has been. Without on-going evaluation there is no way future courses can be improved.

### **Conclusion.**

27. The earlier SPC paper on training pointed out that it was easier to criticize training than to do something about improving it and concluded with the message that good training just did not happen, but rather had to be worked at and made to happen. This still applies and what is apparent is that if training within the region is to be improved the impetus must come from the Fisheries Departments themselves rather than from the trainers. The message from the present paper can be condensed as:-

**NOT MORE TRAINING BUT BETTER TRAINING.**