

Validation Report
October 2019

Regional: Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program – Tranche 1

Reference Number: PVR-633
Project Number: 42291-025
Loan Numbers: 2870 and 3128

Independent
Evaluation  **ADB**

Raising development impact through evaluation

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	– Asian Development Bank
DFL	– distance and flexible learning
DMF	– design and monitoring framework
EMIS	– education management and information system
GAP	– gender action plan
ICT	– information and communication technology
IED	– Independent Evaluation Department
MFF	– multitranches financing facility
PCR	– project completion report
PIC	– Pacific island country
PIU	– project implementation unit
RRP	– report and recommendation of the President
USP	– University of the South Pacific

NOTE

In this report, “\$” refers to United States dollars.

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PROJECT BASIC DATA

Project Number	42291-025	PCR Circulation Date	25 September 2018		
Loan Numbers	2870 and 3128	PCR Validation Date	Oct 2019		
Project Name	Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program – Tranche 1				
Sector and Subsector	Education	Tertiary			
Strategic Agenda	Inclusive economic growth				
Safeguard Categories	Environment		B		
	Involuntary resettlement		C		
	Indigenous peoples		C		
Country	Regional – Kiribati		Approved (\$ million)	Actual (\$ million)	
ADB Financing (\$ million)	ADF: 3.60	Total Project Costs	3.98	5.06	
	OCR: 0.00	Loan			
		L2870		2.60	2.32
		L3128 ^a		0.00	0.89
		Borrower^b		1.00	1.15
		Beneficiaries		–	–
		Others^c	0.38	0.70	
Cofinancier	–	Total Cofinancing	–	–	
Approval Date		Effectiveness Date			
	L2870 L3128	15 Jun 2012 14 May 2014	L2870 L3128	17 Sep 2012 25 Aug 2014	
Signing Date		Closing Date			
	L2870 L3128	19 Jun 2012 27 May 2014	L2870 L3128	30 Jun 2015 30 Jun 2016	
Project Officers		Location	From	To	
	S. Lee C. Thonden	ADB Headquarters ADB Headquarters	Jun 2012 Jan 2014	Jan 2014 Nov 2017	
IED Review Director	W. Kolkma, IETC				
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ADB = Asian Development Bank, ADF = Asian Development Fund, IED = Independent Evaluation Department, IETC = Thematic and Country Division, OCR = ordinary capital resources, PCR = project completion report.

^a The initial appraised amount for tranche 1 did not include the \$1 million additional financing from ADB.

^b The Government of Kiribati provided in-kind contribution for the project.

^c The University of the South Pacific provided funds for the project.

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I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. Rationale

1. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a multitranche financing facility (MFF) to the University of the South Pacific (USP) to finance the Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program in June 2012.¹ The \$23 million investment, with ADB financing of \$19 million, aimed to support USP in expanding access to higher education across its 12 Pacific island country (PIC) members, primarily through enhanced physical facilities as well as strengthened distance and flexible learning programs.² The investment also aimed to address the shortages of trained professionals and technical personnel to increase participation in higher education across the region.³ Improved access to USP would foster the development of a more dynamic workforce with technical and managerial skills needed to develop strong public and private sectors in PICs and drive sustainable development across the Pacific.

2. The MFF was used to allow the phased implementation of individual projects across countries for flexibility in arranging the sovereign guarantees for each tranche and to align ADB support with that from other development partners. It planned for three tranches with investments in USP campuses in Fiji, Kiribati, and the Solomon Islands.

3. The project completion report (PCR) and this validation relate to the first tranche (the project) that financed the expansion and upgrading of the USP Kiribati campus and supported improvements in distance and flexible learning (DFL) programs and in USP governance and project management capacity.

B. Expected Impacts, Outcomes, and Outputs

4. The expected impact of the investment was that the USP graduates contribute to improving the competitiveness and diversifications of PIC economies. The expected outcome was that USP provides expanded and equitable access to quality higher education in its member countries. The five outputs include (i) strengthened regional campuses, (ii) enhanced information and communication technology (ICT)-based education, (iii) improved USP student services, (iv) strengthened USP governance and management, and (v) strengthened project management capacity.

5. The project had the same expected impact and outcome as the program on USP graduates contribute to improved competitiveness and diversification of the economy of Kiribati and of other USP member countries and USP provides expanded and equitable access to quality higher education in Kiribati. This tranche supported outputs 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the investment.

¹ ADB. 2012. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranche Financing Facility to the University of the South Pacific for the Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program*. Manila.

² Member PICs are the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

³ The gross enrollment ratios for higher education were believed to be low in PICs. Footnote 1, Summary Subsector Assessment on Higher Education. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/42291-024-reg-ssa.pdf>

C. Provision of Inputs

6. The MFF was approved in June 2012 and was to be implemented in three tranches over 8 years. The project became effective in October 2012 and closed in June 2016, a year later than planned.⁴ At appraisal, the estimated cost of the project was \$4.0 million. The original financing plan was an ADB loan of \$2.6 million, counterpart funding from USP of \$0.4 million, and an in-kind contribution of \$1.0 million from the Kiribati government. The actual cost of civil works was \$3.6 million, higher than the estimated \$1.9 million at appraisal. To finance additional costs, USP requested additional financing of \$1.0 million from the funds intended for tranche 3.⁵ USP also financed the difference between the revised contract amount of \$3.2 million and ADB financing. ADB approved the additional financing in May 2014 and closed in June 2016 as planned. At completion, the total cost of the project was \$5.1 million, with ADB contributing \$3.2 million; USP, \$0.7 million; and the Kiribati government, \$1.2 million in-kind.

7. Of the six firms that expressed interest, the \$0.2 million lump-sum contract went to a Fijian firm that would prepare the civil works design and tender documents and supervise the civil works at the USP Kiribati campus. The recruitment method was changed from quality- and cost-based selection in the procurement plan to consultants' qualification selection because of the small contract amount, the specialized nature of the work, and the need to expedite recruitment.

8. The investment was categorized as effective gender mainstreaming and a gender action plan (GAP) was prepared. Key features were on encouraging women to enroll in higher education through outreach activities, enhancing data collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data on USP students and faculty, increasing participation of women in USP management committees, employing women in maintenance work, and including gender responsive features in all facilities. The GAP implementation was mainstreamed through the involvement of the USP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

9. The project was classified category B for environment and category C for involuntary resettlement and indigenous peoples under the Safeguard Policy Statement 2009 of ADB.⁶ Only minor adverse environmental impacts were expected, and these were mitigated under an environmental management plan. The project was not expected to require land acquisition or have any impacts on vulnerable groups.

D. Implementation Arrangements

10. The implementation arrangements did not change during the project period. USP was the executing agency with the overall responsibility for the investment implementation. Its vice-chancellor chaired the project steering committee, which supervised and monitored the implementation of project activities and facilitated coordination across agencies. The project implementation unit (PIU) was established within the Development, Marketing, and Communication Division of the university. The PIU, led by the division director as supervisor, implemented and monitored the daily project activities.

11. The loan agreement had 30 covenants, of which 21 were fully complied with. Nine were partially complied with due to (i) late submission of audit reports and failure to submit the opinion

⁴ The physical completion of tranche 1 was in June 2016, while the financial closing was in November 2017.

⁵ ADB. 2014. *Periodic Financing Request Report: Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program (Tranche 1 Additional Financing)*. Manila.

⁶ ADB. 2009. *Safeguard Policy Statement*. Manila.

of the auditor on the use of loan proceeds and compliance with financial covenants, (ii) failure to submit periodic environmental monitoring reports, (iii) partial implementation of the GAP, (iv) failure to disseminate information on sexually transmitted diseases by civil works contractors, (v) deficiencies in project monitoring including no midterm evaluation conducted, and (vi) lack of updated information on bids and procurement on the project website.

12. ADB fielded six project administration missions comprising 33 person-days including inputs from an education specialist, a principal social development specialist, and an operations officer. The project did not have a midterm review and the PCR did not explain why this was not undertaken.

13. The report and recommendation of the President (RRP) identified weak coordination and reporting across the USP regional campuses as a risk that could lead to delays in civil works implementation. The PCR reported that effective PIU monitoring and support had successfully mitigated this risk.

II. EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE AND RATINGS

A. Relevance of Design and Formulation

14. The PCR rated the project relevant because it was consistent with the Pacific Plan of the Pacific Islands Forum⁷ and USP strategic plans for 2010–2012 and 2013–2018,⁸ documents that formed the regional road map for higher education. Endorsed in 2005 and revised in 2007, the Pacific Plan identified an educated population as necessary to achieve economic growth, sustainable development, good governance, and security. USP is expected to lead in providing higher education across the region as the premier regional university. Its strategic plans aimed to enhance the quality and relevance of learning and teaching and expand the provision of higher education across the region. The project supported the regional education priorities and the *Kiribati Development Plan 2016–2019* that identified limited higher education opportunities as a major constraint to increased economic productivity.⁹ The project remained highly relevant at completion to the higher education priorities of the region and Kiribati, and the *Pacific Approach 2016–2020* of ADB.¹⁰

15. The choice of the MFF modality was appropriate since it allowed the phased implementation of individual projects and provided long-term funding certainty to USP. The project was well-designed apart from the significant underestimation of civil works costs that required additional financing and delayed the implementation.

16. The design and monitoring framework (DMF) for the project had some inconsistencies in its internal logic. The outcome statement that USP provides expanded and equitable access to quality higher education in Kiribati addresses the key issues identified in the RRP including poor education quality and relevance, and low access for disadvantaged students, particularly young girls. This links to the expected impact, which assumes both a higher number of graduates and an increase in their skills and competencies. However, the outcome indicators focus on broader access and higher enrollments, and do not address improved relevance or better teaching and

⁷ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2007. *The Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration*. Suva.

⁸ ADB. 2018. *Completion Report: Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program (Tranche 1)*. Manila.

⁹ Government of Kiribati. 2012. *Kiribati Development Plan 2016–2019*. Tarawa.

¹⁰ ADB. 2016. *Pacific Approach 2016–2020*. Manila.

learning. The focus on equity considered access only for women. There are no activities to promote access for students from the remote outer islands or to ensure broader gender balance.

17. Despite these shortcomings, this validation assesses the project relevant. It responded to regional priorities and the need for better access to higher education in remote Kiribati. Its simple design was fully supported by USP and the Kiribati government.

B. Effectiveness in Achieving Project Outcomes and Outputs

18. The PCR rated tranche 1 effective because it contributed significantly to upgrade and modernize higher education in Kiribati. Both outcome performance targets were achieved. The PCR reported that over 1,450 students enrolled in the new Kiribati campus in 2017 against the DMF target of 1,000 by 2020, and 33% were women, more than the target of at least 30%. The total enrollment in the Kiribati campus increased compared to other USP campuses as more locals enrolled. This could be attributed to its new and bigger campus. With fewer Kiribati students in need of funding for studying overseas, the government could finance education more efficiently. The PCR reported that 45%–52% of all female students were enrolled in degree programs between 2013 and 2016, though female enrollment dropped to 33% in 2017, it still met the target and represented a secular increase.¹¹ Based on the evidence presented, this validation assesses the project to have contributed to expanded and more equitable access to higher education in Kiribati. However, the quality of this education could not be established without appropriate indicators. These were not included in the DMF and the PCR did not provide further information.

19. The PCR reported that all of the indicators for outputs 1, 2, and 4 were achieved, while one indicator under output 4 was not achieved.¹² In all, six of the seven indicators were achieved. The major achievements were (i) the new Kiribati campus was completed successfully and was in operation by October 2015 with 10 new teaching rooms and new ICT equipment; (ii) the ICT-based education was enhanced through the transfer of 80% of courses to the Moodle learning management system, with almost 30% of students enrolled in online DFL courses by 2018, and 50% of users were female;¹³ and (iii) USP governance and management was strengthened through improvements in the education management and information system (EMIS) to enhance the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data across USP campuses with all relevant sex-disaggregated data. There are two other planning and management systems—the Dashboard and Business Intelligence System and a Banner system—that seem to serve similar purposes. The PCR did not clarify how the three systems work together, or whether there was an overlap or duplication. The only output target not achieved was the 40% of senior management positions were held by women. Only two of the nine senior managers at the Kiribati campus were women.

20. The PCR did not report any major issues with safeguard compliance. The project was category B for environment because the new facilities were constructed within the existing USP campus in Kiribati. An initial environmental examination and accompanying environmental mitigation and management plan were prepared as required. The initial environmental examination identified potentially relevant issues relating to ecological fragility, potential impacts on limited natural resources, and waste management issues. However, the environmental mitigation and management plan lacked specific guidance on how to manage these issues or specific references to performance and monitoring requirements. The quality of the preparatory

¹¹ The PCR did not provide any explanation on this change.

¹² Female staff hold 28% of management-level positions in the senior management team of USP; this is lower than the 40% target.

¹³ Moodle stands for “modular object-oriented learning environment”. It is an e-learning software platform being used by the University of the South Pacific to manage all of its e-learning courses.

works for safeguards was satisfactory, but attention to environmental aspects appeared to drop significantly during implementation.¹⁴ Despite being a loan covenant, no separate environmental monitoring reports were produced. The PCR stated that any environmental issues that arose were covered adequately in the project performance reports, but this could not be validated. The project was rated C for resettlement and indigenous peoples as there was no land acquisition and no group of indigenous peoples was present in the project area. This validation assesses that the implementation of safeguard-related plans was generally satisfactory.

21. The investment was categorized as effective gender mainstreaming. The primary features of the GAP included encouraging women to enroll in higher education through outreach activities, enhancing data collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data on USP students and faculty, increasing participation of women in USP management committees, employing women in maintenance work, and including gender-responsive features in all facilities. The GAP implementation was mainstreamed through the involvement of the USP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. It included 12 measures or activities, with six measurable targets and four outcome and output gender targets in the DMF.

22. The PCR rated the GAP implementation as only partially successful. Nine of its 12 gender measures were taken, 2 were partially taken, and 1 was not taken. The outreach activities to encourage females to enroll were carried out, but not in remote areas. Project indicators were disaggregated for gender, but the project did not regularly monitor performance on gender indicators. The training on HIV/AIDS and gender issues was not provided for construction workers and women were not employed for construction work. Of the six measurable targets, only three were achieved, one was partially achieved, and two were not achieved. The gender target in the project outcome that 30% of women students would be enrolled in degree programs was exceeded. There were three gender output targets, of which two were achieved—women comprising 50% of students studying online, and the inclusion of sex-disaggregated data in the EMIS. The third output target that women should hold 40% of management-level positions by 2016 was not achieved. Accordingly, this validation assesses the GAP as partially successful.

23. Based on the evidence, this validation assesses the project as on balance effective.

C. Efficiency of Resource Use

24. The PCR rated the project efficient despite some initial delays and the 1-year extension. The PCR indicated that the cost overruns and implementation delays were mainly from the significant underestimation of costs arising from sudden increases in the cost of construction materials, transportation, and a low interest among bidders for the civil works.¹⁵ Two bids were received and both were significantly above the \$1.9 million appraisal cost estimate. USP negotiated with the lowest bidder and made design changes to the proposed building to reduce costs. After extensive consultations, the bid was revised to \$2.9 million. ADB approved the additional financing of \$1.0 million for the project reallocating from tranche 3. Site boundary issues, which presumably could have been foreseen, and the late arrival of a steel shipment caused additional delays. After the resolution of these issues, implementation proceeded smoothly, culminating in the successful construction and handover of the new Kiribati campus with more teaching rooms and facilities than stipulated in the DMF. This increase in cost reflects

¹⁴ ADB (Independent Evaluation Department). 2019. Project Safeguard Assessment: Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program (Tranche 1). 18 January (internal).

¹⁵ The PCR noted that high materials and contractor mobilization costs, along with a low level of interest in bidding for civil works in Kiribati, also affected an ADB-funded road rehabilitation project.

poor planning at design and changes in the cost of construction rather than a decrease in efficiency.

25. The economic benefits of the project were quantified as the increased number of USP graduates working in public and private sectors, higher salaries commanded by USP graduates compared with the labor market outcomes expected for Kiribati youths without undergraduate education, and positive externalities to Kiribati society from having a more educated population. The PCR recalculated economic internal rate of return was 15.4% at project completion, against 15.7% at appraisal. The recalculation lowered the average salary expected by graduates to a more realistic level to reflect domestic Kiribati salaries rather than those in Australia or New Zealand.¹⁶ However, this was offset by more graduates than predicted, higher job placement rates, and revised predictions of future enrollment.

26. This validation has similar view as the PCR and assesses the project efficient, despite the initial delays and the need for a 1-year extension.

D. Preliminary Assessment of Sustainability

27. The PCR rated the project likely sustainable because of the high-level commitment of the Kiribati government and the strong financial position of USP at project completion. The government provided budget support, land for the campus, and tax concessions to the project. USP also committed to support the development of the Kiribati campus with continued expansion of its e-learning offering and other DFL programs as evidenced in its Strategic Plan 2013–2018.

28. The financial sustainability of the project was dependent on that of USP. The PCR demonstrated that, with an annual surplus of over \$4 million from 2015 to 2017, USP had strong financial position. This resulted from increased fee revenue partly from the expanded Kiribati campus and restructuring and expansion of revenue-generating opportunities in USP campuses. Two financial covenants relating to debt to net revenue and operating ratios of USP were fully complied with. USP has also attracted development assistance from bilateral development partners. The largest source of revenue was tuition fees; this increased revenue steadily to 35% in 2017. USP also benefited from continued contributions from member governments and donors.

29. Accordingly, this validation assesses the project likely sustainable.

III. OTHER PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

A. Preliminary Assessment of Development Impact

30. The PCR rated the development impact of the project satisfactory. Aside from the new educational opportunities that would help young people get better jobs with higher salaries, broader societal impacts from a more educated population would also likely foster. These would include more entrepreneurial activity, improved civil engagement and governance, better public health outcomes, and potentially, stronger regional cooperation. This argument assumed that the knowledge gained by graduates of the Kiribati campus would equip them with the high-level knowledge and skills necessary to meet the labor market demands of the country and the broader region, and would enable them to function as effective, proactive, and well-informed citizens.

¹⁶ This approach underestimates the actual economic rate of return. The increased employment potential and higher income from overseas Kiribati citizens contribute to the global economy and the gross national product of Kiribati.

31. The expected impact of the project was that USP graduates would contribute to economic competitiveness and diversification of Kiribati and other USP member countries. The PCR reported that both performance targets were achieved by 2017. The job placement rates among graduates were 63% in 2017, exceeding the 2020 target of 55%. However, the improved job placement rates cannot clearly be attributed to the project since the first cohort of undergraduates from the new campus will graduate in 2020. The steady increases observed in job placement rates are more likely due to the expansion of the public sector that provides 80% of graduate employment. The enrollment in postgraduate programs had increased to 41 by 2018, which doubled the target of 20 by 2020. The PCR did not provide data on the fields of study but, as 70% of these students were female, it is possible that education and health predominate. Postgraduate qualifications in these areas are likely to open doors to regional employment opportunities as well, including in Australia and New Zealand.

32. The PCR indicated that the expansion of the USP Kiribati campus would result in more equitable opportunities for higher education, especially for young people from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. No evidence was provided to support this claim. Primary education in Kiribati is not universal and dropout rates in secondary education are high. Significant improvements in access and support for disadvantaged children at both levels of schooling are needed to enhance equitable access to higher education. This validation assesses the development impact of the project satisfactory. Although it is too early to assess its long-term impact, the new campus itself is likely to have a number of direct benefits. As the global economy becomes more knowledge-orientated, higher education is likely to have a greater impact. In the longer term, the larger pool of qualified graduates and postgraduates in more diverse study areas, resulting from the expanded online access to courses, will produce a more educated population and professional workforce that is better able to contribute to the Kiribati economy.

B. Performance of the Borrower and Executing Agency

33. The PCR rated the performance of USP, as the borrower and the executing agency, satisfactory. The PIU was established within USP in a timely fashion. It provided effective oversight of the project and engaged with ADB regularly. The PIU managed activities effectively. However, there were some shortcomings. Both the PCRs of the government and ADB noted that the quarterly progress reports were not submitted on time and were often incomplete. Separate environmental monitoring reports were also not submitted, and the government completion report was almost 1 year late. USP submitted annual audited project financial statements but the opinion of the auditor on the use of the loan proceeds and compliance with the financial covenants was never submitted. However, the effective supervision and oversight of the PIU that led to the successful completion of the project outweigh these shortcomings in project administration.

34. This validation assesses the performance of USP satisfactory.

C. Performance of the Asian Development Bank

35. The PCR rated the performance of ADB satisfactory. ADB fielded review missions every 6 months except in the final year. Although stipulated in the loan covenants, ADB never carried out a midterm review. The reasons for this were not given in the PCR nor in any of the back-to-office reports. Most missions included only an education or social development specialist. No safeguards specialist took part in the missions despite the shortcomings in environmental monitoring. The government PCR noted that ADB was responsive and acted promptly to address the need for additional financing and other issues in the implementation of civil works, the

procurement of equipment, and the recruitment of consultant services. However, it also commented that more guidance and training by ADB would have helped implementation as this was the first ADB-financed project with USP.

36. Despite some shortcomings such as the lack of a midterm review mission, the underestimation of civil works costs, and the view of the government that more training and guidance was needed from ADB, this validation assesses the performance of ADB satisfactory since the missions conducted put the project on track.

IV. OVERALL ASSESSMENT, LESSONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Overall Assessment and Ratings

37. The PCR rated the project successful because it was considered relevant, effective, efficient, and likely sustainable. This validation assesses the project relevant, effective, efficient, and likely sustainable, with an overall rating of successful. The project focused on a few key components including the construction of a new campus building to expand local access to higher education, up-to-date ICT equipment to expand access to a broader range of online courses delivered from the regional campus, and the enhancement of the USP EMIS. Despite the initial cost overruns and delays, the project achieved 10 of the 11 key performance indicators for the impact, outcome, and outputs.

Overall Ratings

Validation Criteria	PCR	IED Review	Reason for Disagreement and/or Comments
Relevance	Relevant	Relevant	
Effectiveness	Effective	Effective	
Efficiency	Efficient	Efficient	
Sustainability	Likely sustainable	Likely sustainable	
Overall assessment	Successful	Successful	
Preliminary assessment of impact	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Performance of borrower and executing agency	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Performance of ADB	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of PCR		Satisfactory	Para. 43.

ADB = Asian Development Bank, IED = Independent Evaluation Department, PCR = project completion report.

Source: Asian Development Bank and Independent Evaluation Department.

B. Lessons

38. The PCR identified six lessons, five of which related to project design and implementation on (i) the lack of ongoing training by ADB on its processes and procedures, including safeguards supervision, which was a missed opportunity for deepening understanding and overcoming capacity gaps resulting from staff changes; (ii) the project schedule that should be flexible enough to allow for unforeseen implementation delays; (iii) monitoring and evaluation that should be prioritized with clearly identified activities and schedule with sufficient time allocation, and the conduct of final evaluation to determine the impact of the project and assess its sustainability; (iv) the cost estimates that should be as accurate as possible to avoid unnecessary delays; (v) project designs that should be comprehensive to avoid the possibility of unfunded critical items;

and (vi) education projects with investment on infrastructure that should also address teaching and learning challenges. The first five lessons are directly from the implementation experience and, although not new, are justified within the context of the project. This validation has similar view that education projects should not focus solely on infrastructure. This lesson is valid but would have been strengthened by some information on the particular teaching and learning challenges to be addressed.

39. This validation identifies further lessons as follows:

- (i) **At the results framework level**, outcome statements should be more carefully worded to be consistent with the DMF and the theory of change. These should be limited to what a project can deliver through its outputs and activities, even if the focus is narrow. Instead, there is a common tendency to embellish project outcomes. The consequence is a broad project outcome that goes beyond what can be achieved.
- (ii) **At the sector level**, there is a need for more nuanced and layered approaches to address gender. The project aimed to ensure that at least 30% of all female students would be enrolled in degree programs by 2018, against a baseline of 12% in 2011. The reason for the low female enrollment in degree programs was their high enrollment in nondegree programs linked to traditional professions like education and health. However, other equally relevant issues as majority of overall enrollments were female were not considered. The data presented in the PCR shows that females made up 66% of enrollments from 2014 to 2018. The broader issue, however, is the marked under-enrollment of males in higher education. Activities to encourage more males to take up higher education and to encourage females to diversify their fields of study at degree level would have strengthened the project by tackling gender issues more comprehensively.

C. Recommendations for Follow-Up

40. The PCR recommended (i) more implementation support from the procurement and infrastructure specialists of the Fiji Subregional Office, (ii) greater flexibility in project schedules with more allowance for delays, and (iii) increased feedback from project monitoring and evaluation into project implementation.

41. This validation has a similar view and supports these recommendations. Since the MFF is still ongoing, this validation also recommends that ADB continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of tranche 1 by collecting more qualitative data through observations and interviews at the Kiribati campus. This should focus on their satisfaction with the new facilities and equipment, the adequacy of connectivity, and the effectiveness of online learning by students with generally weak foundational skills.

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

A. Monitoring and Reporting

42. The monitoring and reporting of the project were weak in several areas. The PIU monitored project progress every 6 months and submitted quarterly progress reports but did not diligently update progress on the performance indicators as required in the loan covenants. The PCR of the government noted that the PIU allocated insufficient time for project monitoring.

The environmental monitoring also did not meet the requirement for separate reporting. ADB fielded six monthly review missions which appeared adequate in terms of length. Neither the government nor the ADB undertook a midterm review as required under the loan agreement. ADB also did not field a PCR mission—no findings were reported in the PCR. The ADB PCR relied on the findings in the PCR of the government and no new insights were presented. Both PCRs noted the need for a final evaluation to assess the project impact and its sustainability.

B. Comments on Project Completion Report Quality

43. This validation assesses the quality of the ADB PCR as satisfactory. It was clearly written and candidly documented the achievements and shortcomings of the project using quantitative data for the key performance indicators. However, it relied heavily on the completion report of the government, which though lacked details, provided most of the lessons discussed in the ADB PCR. Field observations and interviews or focus group discussions with staff and students would have yielded additional insight into implementation issues, the successes of the project, and its potential impact, particularly in relation to the quality and equity aspects of the outcome that were not measured. Given that the drive to improve connectivity and increase enrollments in e-learning was a key output, it is surprising that the PCR did not examine this issue further by reviewing connectivity levels after the new equipment was installed or how well e-learning was working in the Kiribati context. This would have provided additional depth to the ADB PCR.

C. Data Sources for Validation

44. This validation used data from the RRP and its appendices, both PCRs of the government and ADB, and ADB internal documents.

D. Recommendation for Independent Evaluation Department Follow-Up

45. IED should consider a project performance evaluation report after completion of the MFF. This should involve a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the interventions on expanding access to higher education in the regional campuses, on gender and social equity, and on the quality and relevance of the courses offered. The success of various teaching and learning modes including e-learning, the effectiveness of the measures to improve the governance and management of USP, and the impact of the project on graduate employability should also be covered.