



A WHITE PAPER ON THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S OVERSEAS AID PROGRAM

Background Brief – delivering better education

Australia is to significantly increase its investment in education in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Issue

Education provides an escape route from poverty. A healthy and educated workforce is more productive. Literate and numerate mothers experience lower infant mortality and have fewer but healthier and better-educated children. An informed citizenry is more likely to hold accountable those in political and bureaucratic power. Ensuring that all children have access to affordable, good-quality, primary education is a key benchmark for a functioning state.

Despite recent progress on education over 100 million girls and boys around the world are still not in school and will grow up to become part of the 800 million adults comprising the bulk of the world's poor. Two-thirds of all illiterate adults are women, and in South Asia over 60 per cent of children out of school are girls. In much of the Asia-Pacific region underinvestment in education has resulted in weak school systems and poor-quality education. Across much of the Pacific, growing numbers of young people are putting pressure on already strained school systems, contributing to a progressive decline in education quality.

Australia is already active in supporting education in our region. AusAID is working with Indonesia through the Learning Assistance Program for Islamic Schools (LAPIS) which addresses the specific needs of Islamic schools which educate an estimated 8.5 million students in Indonesia.

Enrolments are growing, particularly from the poorer sectors of the community and from young women and girls.

In Papua New Guinea, Australian investment in the education sector has helped the number of children attending school almost double in a decade to approximately 1 million in 2002. It has also increased access to education through the establishment of 4,200 elementary schools serving 300,000 children with elementary lessons taught in more than 200 languages.

Future Initiative – *Delivering better education*

Australia will make a major investment to get more children into school, for longer and for a better quality education. It will also pursue strengthened links between education and employment. A major new education strategy will be developed, focusing on:

- addressing education financing, management and accountability
- targeting pockets of education disadvantage using state, private, faith-based and non-government organisations
- improving education quality through teacher training and deployment, production and supply of curriculum materials, school development and maintenance
- supporting the new Australia-Pacific Technical College, and
- ensuring that girls' education is given particular attention.