

Contrasting Cases: The Cook Islands and Solomon Islands

In this section we compare the Cook Islands with Solomon Islands. The latter is one of the largest countries in the Pacific region, with relatively low per capita incomes, a high percentage of rural population, low levels of investment, and least access to post-secondary education relative to population size.

The Cook Islands, in contrast, is one of the smallest Pacific islands countries, which has high levels of access to post-secondary education. However, access is higher again in the French territories (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna), the US territories (Guam, Northern Marianas, Palau and, of course, the State of Hawaii), and the countries with Associated State relations with USA (Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia). There are educational advantages in having an association with larger and richer systems.

There is at times so much emphasis on what Pacific islands countries have in common, that the vast differences between them may be overlooked. For those who do not have time to read this section in detail, it illustrates:

- 1 The enormous increase in post-secondary education being provided outside the conventional educational institutions. This includes business firms training programmes for their staffs;

courses offered by international agencies and NGOs; informal learning through the media; the growth of private educational systems (both locally and by correspondence); and learning from the purchase of books, computer disks, videos, audio cassettes and other means. These are the areas of fastest growth and greatest potential, even though they have not generally received much financial or other support from national governments.

- 2 The much greater benefits that smaller countries can get in higher education than larger ones, from bilateral donors, multi-lateral donors, regional educational institutions, and international firms.
- 3 The concentration of benefits from higher education in national and regional capitals, with relatively little permeating to those in rural communities.
- 4 The strong correlation of high per capita income levels with high access to all forms of post-secondary education.
- 5 The educational advantages of those Pacific islands countries with privileged access to metropolitan countries.

The Cook Islands case

Although the national population is 17,500, post-secondary education is largely confined to the capital island of Rarotonga, with a population of 9,800 (56 per cent). This situation of very little post-secondary education being available beyond the national capital occurs throughout the Pacific islands. The extent of post-secondary education in Rarotonga is an amazing increase over even a decade ago, reflecting a world-wide trend. Partly because the Cook Islands is one of the smallest countries, it has a high ratio of post-secondary education per head of population.

Full and part-time study in Cook Islands

In compiling statistics on post-secondary education in the Cook Islands we found that records of the Personnel Planning and Training Office apply in most cases only to civil servants. We comment on training outside the service later. Also, the accessible

Table 1: Full-time students in the Cook Islands

Government post-secondary courses of one year or more

Teachers College, 2 year primary course (secondary trained in NZ)	35
Nursing, 3 year clinical course for diploma	10
Nurse Practitioner post-grad 1 year (for islands with no doctors)	6
Theological, 4 year minister's course, 13 couples	26
USP/Tereora College joint pre-degree programme (as each student takes 5 courses = 120 USP credit course enrolments)	24
Approximate total (varies continually)	81

Table 2: Full-time, short-term, post-secondary courses in Cook Islands

Government and international agencies

(Not all are offered each year)

Public service induction courses for new staff	about 120 p.a.
Public service basic supervision course	about 20 p.a.
Personnel management courses	about 20 p.a.
Trade training	
1 month courses at 3 levels, below apprentice, in electrical wiring, mechanic and construction	60 p.a.
Regional & sub-regional courses, 1 to 6 weeks in admin., financial management, etc. funded by ILO, AIDAB, SPC & others	80 p.a.
Catholic, 3 month lay leader's course, 6 couples	12
Police, 10 weeks basic course	6
Travel industry (not including in-house training)	360
Approx total Cook Islanders per year	678

*Table 3: Part-time post-secondary study in the Cook Islands***University**

USP Extension Centre, 1st semester, 1991 credit course enrolments	331
(most take one course, a few take two)	
non-credit courses, taught locally	100
Massey University approx per year	5
University of New England	1
Other universities overseas approx per year	5

Other

Assistant Health Inspectors, 3 year course	3
Laboratory technicians	3
Apprenticeships (4 year) in 7 trades	17
Police, 2 years applied training with study for examination	8
Banking courses (mainly in-house)	30
Airlines, travel agents, shipping, communications	50
CI Bible Training College (Assemblies of God), part-time 1.5 years course, graduates in 1990	21
Estimated part-time training by other religious denominations, of which there are about 14	200
At least 2 theological distance schools (in Samoa & NZ)	200?

Also:

- Sports administrators, trainers, etc. Olympic funding sends coaches, lecturers, etc. to CI to run courses up to 3 months in each sport and in sports medicine, administration, certification, etc; and funds Cook Islanders to the Australian Institute of Sport and elsewhere
- Youth organisations, (15) most youth belong to 1 national in which training is important, and 1 local social/community organisation
- Cultural organisations (15) emphasise training in performing

Table 3 continued

arts. Though not certified, they travel and have earned the Cook Islands an international reputation for excellence.

- Women's organisations (44). Most have a training function, generally in food production, preparation or preservation, clothing and family welfare. The National Council of Women, with the Women's Affairs Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, has run workshops in small business, human resource development and other subjects, usually subsidised by aid grants.
- Worker and professional associations (8) give priority to education. The Public Service Association runs workshops and courses in association with Public Service International.
- International voluntary organisations also play a role in training.

records were not all for the same year: those for full-time and part-time scholarships are for 1990, those for in-country short courses for 1988, and those for overseas short courses for 1987. This is not, however, a major problem, as there has been no radical change. The main trend, as one would expect for a small nation, is for an increasing proportion of higher education to be undertaken overseas.

This can only be an estimate, but the number of Cook Islanders in part-time training each year may be higher than the 9,800 adults on Rarotonga, as many are involved in several programmes. This is not so on the other islands, owing to the concentration of opportunities on Rarotonga.

Full-time study abroad

Cook Islanders going abroad for full-time study used to be concentrated in New Zealand, but over the past two decades study sources have spread remarkably. This reflects the wider range of scholarship opportunities and the greater interaction of the Cook Islands with

Table 4: Students in post-secondary institutions overseas
(FT = Full time; SC = Short course; Gov = Government; Pr = Private)

	AS	NZ	FJ	SM	TN	PNG	SL	VN	NC	FSM	MR	OPI	US	AS	ER	Total
FTGov	21	36	24	5	5	5	3						2/1		1	98
FTPr	2	15	5 (SDA)		7 (SDA)								29/1		1	60
FTTot	23	51	29	5	-	12	3	-	-	-	-	-	31/2		2	158
SCGov	24	10	28	21	6	5	5	9	5	1	1	6	10/-	12	1	144
SCPr	15	25	15										10	5		70
Total	85	137	101	31	6	29	11	9	5	1	1	6	86	17	5	530

Abbreviations: AS = Australia; NZ = New Zealand; FJ = Fiji; SM = Samoa; TN = Tonga; PNG = Papua New Guinea; SL = Solomon Islands; VN = Vanuatu; NC = Caledonia; FSM = Federated States of Micronesia; MR = Marshall Islands; OPI = Other Pacific Islands (4 Kiribati, 1 American Samoa, 1 French Polynesia); US = United States of America/Canada (most at Brigham Young University in Hawaii); AS = Asia (Japan 4, Malaysia 3, Philippines 2, India, Singapore, Thailand 1); ER = Europe

other countries. The present mix has 67 per cent of students in the industrialised countries of the Pacific Rim with which the Cook Islands interacts most on trade, migration, investment, aid, diplomatic and security relations, etc., and 33 per cent with other Pacific Islands with which there are some common interests, though less economic or political interaction.

The area of needed growth seems to us to be North-east Asia, particularly Japan, China, even Indonesia. These are the countries which Cook Islanders are going to need to understand and with which they will be increasingly interacting. The first Thai scholarships for degree courses in Thai universities, were taken up in 1991; some went on short courses to Japan, and there are other examples.

New Zealand remains the largest single source of post-secondary education, with 30 per cent of the total. Next comes USA (mainly Hawaii) and Fiji with 19 per cent each, Australia with 15 per cent, Papua New Guinea with 8 per cent, and the last 8 per cent go elsewhere. The biggest recent change has been the growth of Hawaii as a study destination – mainly Brigham Young University, but also University of Hawaii and others.

Those who go overseas for full-time study, overwhelmingly prefer the industrialised countries (mainly New Zealand, Australia or USA). Students fear the difficulty of learning a new language and therefore resist the idea of study in Japan, France, Germany or elsewhere where scholarships are available but a new language is required. Some prefer islands institutions usually because they are reputed to have easier standards rather than because they want to study in islands institutions. But student preferences are not the main determinants of where students study; scholarships are. Where they are tenable is decided by the donors.

Other sources

Statutory authorities

Police and prison officers do about two years training and service in the Cook Islands. Then, after passing local examinations, about six of the former and one or two of the latter go to New Zealand each

year for a course. Later in their careers they return for the New Zealand police or prison courses at various levels. One police officer is studying law in New Zealand. When external funds are available for training in other countries, these opportunities are taken.

We will not detail the other statutory authorities beyond noting how changes in the sources of aid correlate with changes in training. For example, as a result of recent diplomatic efforts by France to enhance its standing in the region, French generators were supplied to the Electric Power Supply in a package which involves training in France.

Tourism

Tourism is the nation's largest industry. The CI Tourist Authority has the equivalent of four full-time training officers and an extensive training programme, in association with the Hospitality Industry Training Board and the CI Hospitality Training School. The School has a throughput of about 240 students per year on a block release system. Courses in hospitality industry vocations are also taught at the three main colleges.

Short courses of three days to six weeks duration are taught by specialists brought from overseas for this purpose. In 1990 some 324 persons attended such courses. Three private sector travel industry staff were also sent by the Authority to short courses in Vanuatu and two to Tonga. The Authority emphasises training for those in the private sector as it considers the results are more positive.

The three major hotels have limited training programmes both in country and overseas. The many smaller hotels and motels do on the job training but few send staff overseas except those funded by the Tourist Authority.

Tourism has widened the demand for leisure activities to such an extent that there are now commercial tennis schools, sailing schools and other leisure skill training activities used by visitors and local people alike.

Airlines

The domestic airlines provide extensive training locally and overseas. Air New Zealand, the largest international carrier, has a complex training programme, both on the job combined with private study, and in Auckland. Perhaps 20 per cent of the 40 staff go to Auckland annually for short courses. Polynesian Airlines has a smaller training programme.

The CI Airport Authority pays for training staff from the NZ Aeronautical College. Others go there or to ICAO Centres in Bangkok or Singapore. Telecommunications staff are trained first in Fiji and then in New Zealand. They also take extension courses with the University of the South Pacific, with Stott's College or with International Correspondence Schools.

Travel agents all undertake courses for certification by the client airlines and by the NZ Travel Industry Federation.

Shipping

Training in shipping has been extensive. The police train all crew for the patrol vessels in Australia and New Zealand. The government sponsors a small training staff, and six trainees on private commercial vessels.

Banking

ANZ and Westpac banks each send several staff each year to Fiji for courses, and training staff from Fiji, Australia or New Zealand conduct courses in Rarotonga. Staff are sponsored to attend short courses locally in computing, word processing, etc., and for in-house courses, including optional 'self-development' courses. The largest of the trust banks holds a daily meeting of professional staff to discuss cases and principles. Staff who take courses with USP, Massey or other extension systems, have their fees paid. The CI Development Bank pays fees for staff who take extension courses through the Bankers' Institute in New Zealand, or through USP. It normally has one or two staff overseas in full-time training at

universities in Fiji, New Zealand or Australia. A training officer is employed, and the Asian Development Bank finances short-term training for Cook Islands staff in other countries.

Communications and media

In communications and media, the CI Broadcasting Corporation (radio and television) uses in-service training and facilities in the region and beyond. Many more courses are offered than they can take up, owing to the small staff. The nation's only newspaper accepts few of the offers received for the same reason. They recently had a journalist at the University of Queensland, and another at a New Zealand polytechnic, but otherwise use on the job training and correspondence courses.

Mention must be made of the educative role of the media. Television, broadcasting 35 hours per week, includes seven hours of international news, and two hours of national news, per week. Radio offers news bulletins from several countries as well as nationally. Television presents four hours a week of young children's educational programmes, for example, Playschool and Sesame Street; at least two hours a week of adult education, for example, 'Beyond 2000' and 'Wild South'; and five hours a week of cultural material, including scientific films from Smithsonian Institution and others, and expressive arts. Television has more of an educational content (both positive and negative) than radio.

Telecom Cook Islands has an extensive training programme in-house, using distance education, sending staff overseas, and bringing in trainers. At the time of enquiry a German trainer from ITU was conducting a digital fault-finding course for TCI staff.

Computing

The demand for computing skills outstrips supply, but most has been provided outside institutions of higher education. The government has provided courses for civil servants, sometimes by hiring private firms. The larger firms have their own training staff or contract with one of the five computer sales, service and software companies on Rarotonga (a surprising number for a population of

9,000) to provide it. Perhaps 20 times more adults have received computing training outside the formal education system than within it. Even though the demand for these urgently needed skills has been apparent for over a decade, formal institutions (here as world-wide) are slow to respond except in token ways.

Engineering

The main automotive engineering firms send staff to Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and elsewhere in the region, for seminars and workshops sponsored mainly by Japanese suppliers. Some suppliers send trainers to the Cook Islands (usually from New Zealand or Australia) to conduct short courses and some local firms bring in their own trainers. At the time of writing one firm had an expert in computer-assisted engine diagnosis from Australia to run a short course for their staff.

Apprentices in several fields take a three-year course which involves some training in New Zealand. Some senior staff have a training role, and one mechanic runs an evening course in the USP continuing education programme in vehicle maintenance. One automotive firm had one staff member studying a course in Japanese language and one in accounting with the USP Centre.

Culturing of pearls

The lucrative culturing of pearls in Manihiki atoll provides one of the few areas of significant training outside Rarotonga. Tahitian experts taught the farming techniques, drilling, advanced diving skills, harvesting, grading and management. Although Manihikians are famous divers (a Manihikian long held the world record for skin diving) international certification is now required. Japanese experts are flown in to do the delicate seeding operation. They will not teach their skills.

General merchants

The largest general merchant hires an independent professional to provide computer courses as required, pays the fees of staff undertaking USP courses, and sends staff to other training programmes

such as short courses sponsored by the Cook Islands Tourist Authority.

Other training is undertaken by small businesses, for example, the only pharmacy conducts a brief weekly training session and brings product specialists from abroad several times a year, but we have not checked these in detail.

Voluntary organisations

Nor are records kept of the voluntary organisations (NGOs), of which there are over 220 in the Cook Islands (Crocombe, 1991), but some send students abroad for full and part-time courses. Those conducted by the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the South Pacific Commission Community Development Programme work closely with government, even though the students may be from NGOs. Others work independently: for example, the Rotary Club has sent five students away on one year scholarships for post-secondary study. The Public Service Association and Public Service International have several union representatives abroad per year for workshops and short courses.

Churches

Almost all the churches send people abroad for theological, community development, counselling and other courses.

Extent of post-secondary education

Adding all these, several thousand persons are taking post-secondary courses in one form or another per year within the country (including those studying by distance methods from abroad), and 300 to 400 per year abroad. This is a remarkable figure, and means that each person of working age on Rarotonga is engaged, on average, in some form of education and training each year, and about 10 per cent of such people go overseas for all or part of the time to do so. Most organisations would facilitate more training if courses were available.

There are several explanations for these high levels.

- 1 Cook Islanders have had widespread secondary education since the 1950s.
- 2 The Associated State relationship with New Zealand gives all Cook Islanders free access to New Zealand and Australia, and to the institutions of higher education of both, with all the privileges of local citizens.
- 3 Most higher education overseas is financed by foreign aid or by international businesses. Higher education internally is financed by aid, business or the Cook Islands government.
- 4 Most post-secondary education outside the Cook Islands is free, and the main exceptions (Brigham Young University and the Pacific Adventist College) provide opportunities for students to earn their fees and living costs. A few families send children abroad for post-secondary education at family expense, and this is facilitated by the relatively high per capita incomes in the Cook Islands (about US\$ 3000 per year in contrast with the Pacific Islands average of about US\$ 700).
- 5 Some years ago the government, to encourage more people to study, offered to refund the fees of all who passed their courses, and a salary increase for every degree or diploma. The opposition sought more popularity by offering a salary increase for a section of a degree or diploma. The next counter-offer saw a salary increase for every course passed towards a degree, although it is not paid if the department's budget is low. With government as the largest employer, this led to a big increase in studies and salaries!
- 6 A further increase in extension studies occurred from mid 1990 when the USP Centre began advertising its courses at prime time on national television.

Driving forces

The driving forces of the revolutionary changes in higher education of the past generation are threefold.

Aid donors

Both governments and international agencies offer scholarships,

training staff, travel funds, equipment and construction costs to facilitate an ever widening range of training programmes at home and abroad. The vast majority of all government-sponsored post-secondary education, whether at home or abroad, is funded from abroad.

Larger international firms

The big international firms provide the driving force in the private sector, bringing in patterns of training applied in their countries of origin.

Work and study

The third major factor is the emergence of institutions which provide structured facilities for students to work and pay their own way through higher education. For example, within the Cook Islands:

- the USP Extension Centre
- government in-service training courses
- the training programmes provided by all the larger firms.

Overseas examples are:

- Brigham Young University, which has nearly 30 Cook Islands students
- Pacific Adventist College, which has seven
- private students in New Zealand or Australia working their way through.

Comparison with Solomon Islands

It is not necessary to reiterate all the adult education available in Solomon Islands that is in principle the same as those in the Cook Islands, for example: the public service has a similar programme for civil servants; the same major banks operate with the same training policies; the same international agencies run similar courses; there is a USP Centre; many of the same NGOs are active with their respective training components; and there are many programmes for the training of trainers, which speed up the internal training process. There are, however, some major differences, and it is on these that we focus.

Solomon Islands has 18 times the population of the Cook Islands, is much less urbanised, has about one quarter the per capita GNP, and formal education began considerably later. Another major difference is that all Cook Islanders have free access to both Australia and New Zealand (whether for education or any other purpose). Solomon Islands, like most of the rest of the region, has no such external outlet.

In the USP extension centres, the number of students studying for extension credit courses, summer schools (Dec. 1990/Feb. 1991) and continuing education programmes in the first semester of 1991 illustrate the radical difference.

Extension enrolments	Summer School enrolments	Continuing ed. enrolments	Total	Per 1000 of population
Cook Is. 451	28	155	634	37.3
Solomon Is. 314	37	74	425	1.4

Reasons for differences

Before going into the reasons for Cook Islanders receiving 27 times more education per capita through this source (and with similar discrepancies through some other sources), we might note that the contrast exemplifies how drastically pouring aid funds into a regional centre can discriminate against the most disadvantaged.

Thus a major factor holding back higher education in Solomon Islands has been that the external aid nominally allocated to it through regional institutions has been siphoned off, mainly by the host country. Solomon Islands has 20 per cent of the USP region's population, and if 20 per cent of the aid funds put into regional post-secondary institutions in Fiji had been put into upgrading the highest levels of education in Solomon Islands, they would have been much better off today. For example, relative to population size, USP has produced nearly ten times more graduates from Fiji than from Solomon Islands. Likewise, more than ten times more has been spent, almost all financed by foreign aid to the region, on training Fiji academic staff than Solomon Islanders.

Yet another difference is that as incomes are higher in the Cook Islands, government and individuals can spend more on education. Moreover, there are high material rewards for study in the Cook Islands. Civil servants, much the largest part of the workforce, receive a salary increment for every single relevant course they pass, within their grade. Almost everyone we spoke to feels that this is taking study incentives too far, but once introduced by one government, it is difficult for another to change it. And it becomes a precedent for other employers who are competing for staff.

Another important difference is access by preparation. All Cook Islanders receive secondary schooling, but only about 10 per cent of Solomon Islanders. Differences of geographical access are discussed under 'Equity issues' on page 126 and of gender under 'Access for women' on page 129.

On the question of age, the part-time extension students in the Cook Islands come from a wider range (i.e. only 144 or 44 per cent are under 26, whereas 187 or 56 per cent are 26 and over) than those in Solomon Islands. The figures for Solomon Islands are not available, but most are thought to be under 26. This is partly because secondary education has been available for longer in the Cook Islands, so that once new courses and incentives to take them are in place, there are more potential candidates of all ages. Moreover, due to the mobility of Cook Islanders between the Cook Islands, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere, and the extent of intermarriage with non-Cook Islanders, English is more widely spoken.

Too often we hear of the disadvantages of smallness. In higher education at least, there are big advantages. The only countries with more access than the Cook Islands are both smaller. Nauru, with half the population, has virtually unlimited access because with income from phosphate it can afford to send students almost anywhere. Niue, with a lower per capita income, and one ninth the population of the Cook Islands, has a higher rate of overseas education. This is largely because donors feel obliged to provide something for each country. A community the size of Niue within

Papua New Guinea, for example, would qualify for very few of the training opportunities Niue has because of its national status.

Recent educational developments in Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands is developing a major tertiary institution in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), which has Schools of Education and Cultural Studies, Nursing and Health Studies, Finance and Administration, Industrial Development, Natural Resources, Marine and Fishery Studies, and General Studies. By 1991 the College had 1,285 students in full-time credit courses, plus a growing programme of non-credit adult education courses.

In addition, a new distance education network called SIDEN (Solomon Islands Distance Education Network) has been set up with the help of the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver. It is providing bridging courses for people in rural sub-centres to enable them to qualify for diploma courses on the campus. The European Community has just provided \$6 million to establish 25 Rural Training Centres to enhance this exciting project in distance education, which could radically improve prospects for education at all levels in Solomon Islands. It is also an experiment from which all Pacific islands and countries beyond may learn and benefit.

There are also other tertiary institutions such as the Solomon Islands Telecommunications Training School, the Police Academy, and several theological colleges, as well as computer training by private as well as government sources. On the creative side, some 28 books by Solomon Islanders have been published in the past twenty years.

The Solomon Islands government has several times stated its intention to upgrade SICHE to university level, but it has been dissuaded by aid donors who have considerable power in such matters. Hopefully this goal will not be too long delayed, as their effective access to other sources (mainly University of the South Pacific and University of Papua New Guinea) leaves Solomon Islands educationally marginalised.



