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Pacific Outreach Program – Tonga Program Evaluation Research Report

Report prepared for the National Rugby League (NRL)
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**Australian
Aid** 

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Executive Summary

Program Background:

The NRL's Pacific Outreach Program is a three-way partnership between the Australian Government (represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT), the Government in Tonga, and the Australian Rugby League Commission (represented by the NRL).

Program Aim:

The Pacific Outreach Program was funded using an Innovation grant and extends the League for Life programming that was originally implemented in Papua New Guinea. The program focus and implementation varies depending on the unique requirements of each country, but improving overall wellbeing and children's engagement with education are key components.

Purpose of this Report:

To undertake a qualitative research evaluation of the Pacific Outreach Program in Tonga to identify progress and indicators of program success held by the various stakeholders in Australia and Tonga.

Key Findings:

This review has followed three overarching themes and has identified areas where progress has been made, in combination with highlighting issues that can be addressed to improve the program. The three themes are: 1) State of Play: Contextual Factors Influencing Sport-For-Development in Tonga, 2) Progress Achieved and 3) League for Life Development Areas. Key findings within each are outlined below.

- **State of Play, contextual factors influencing sport-for-development in Tonga:** The program is situated within a unique context, with factors categorised into Macro (broad environmental context), Meso (operating environment, e.g. key stakeholders) and Micro Levels (internal operations). The NRL has most control over the Meso and Micro Levels.
- **Progress Achieved:** Successful establishment of League for Life in Tonga, refinement of program aims, stakeholder engagement, training provision, delivery of sporting opportunities for marginalised groups, social and behavioural messaging/outcomes, and the promotion of rugby league in Tonga.
- **Areas For Development:** Further training of NRL staff and establishing clear career development pathways, stakeholder engagement and communication, provision of program resources, long-term program planning, allocation of more staffing resources to administration and ongoing management of related processes.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Pacific Outreach Program

The NRL's Pacific Outreach Program is delivered via funding support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Innovation funding, corporate support and the NRL. In Tonga the program is delivered as 'League for Life', which encapsulates the essence of the overarching aims. The program is a result of a comprehensive program design process, strategically formulated to contribute to development outcomes. Initially the program only existed in Papua New Guinea, however it has now been introduced in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji. The program aims in each location are dependent on the unique contextual issues that are present and are tailored to foster relevant development outcomes.

1.2 Sport-for-Development Approaches

There are various conceptual and practical approaches to sport-for-development and a brief overview is useful in terms of providing a framework for understanding and evaluating a program such as this. A well-regarded academic and practitioner, Coalter (2008) describes the difference between two common approaches to sport-for-development programs:

1. Sport Plus: Focus is on developing sustainable sport organisations (increases in capacity and participation), social messages may be communicated; or
2. Plus Sport: Sport programs are conducted to engage large numbers of participants, communicate social messages and encourage behaviour change.

Programs may be one or the other, or a hybrid approach between the two types (Coalter, 2008). Understanding a program approach is important to define the identity and focus of a program and the most appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes. Coalter (2008) highlights that sport organisations delivering programs with a 'Plus Sport' approach often face the challenge of rationalising progress based on sport capacity and participation indicators, which will be difficult to demonstrate if that is not the central aim of the program, as is the case with League for Life.

Coalter (2008) has developed a process model to guide planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sport-for-development programs, which is summarised in Table 1 for reference. Coalter's logic model has informed the analysis and presentation of findings, but has been modified in relation to emerging themes.

Table 1: Coalter's (2008) Logic Model for Sport-In-Development Programs

<p>Aims</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Consultation with community/stakeholders <i>Audit of community conditions/resources</i></p> <p>↓</p> <p>Aims (affirmed or revised)/objectives <i>Performance Indicators</i></p>	<p>Aims and objectives of a sport-in-development program should be documented as precisely as possible to help build culture and philosophy of program, engage stakeholders, maintain focus and guide monitoring and evaluation.</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Inputs</p>	<p>The organisational and community resources (e.g. financial, human, organisational and material resources) used to create and run the program</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Outputs 1 <i>[staff training/development]</i></p>	<p>The development of peer leaders, coaches and educators – key to capacity, delivery and sustainability Operates at organisational level and a personal level for those involved in training and development</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Outputs 2 <i>Programs: sporting/non-sporting [content/process]</i></p>	<p>What is being delivered (i.e. content and quantity of output) and an understanding of the process of delivery and what impacts on the effectiveness, or not, of the program.</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Sporting Inclusion <i>Equity/target groups</i></p>	<p>Program provision of sporting opportunities for as many young people as possible, with an emphasis on diversity. The extent to which this is achieved influences the program's potential for achieving social goals through sport.</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Sporting Outcomes <i>Skills competencies</i></p>	<p>Core sport outcomes are critical to long-term participation and development in sport in the community once a program has concluded; sporting skills contribute to an individual's sporting skills and self-esteem contributes to the development of non-sport outcomes targeted by programs.</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Intermediate Outcomes <i>(i) Personal/social development (ii) Information/understanding</i></p>	<p>Sport-in-development programs typically aim to achieve personal and social development through programs (e.g. sport skills lead to self-esteem). Programs also aim to promote social messaging to enhance understanding of an issue (e.g. health outcomes), Coalter highlights this is not an automatic outcome of a sport program and instead needs to be facilitated.</p>
<p>↓</p> <p>Impacts <i>Changed behaviours</i></p>	<p>Due to challenges of attribution, it is extremely challenging to conclude that behaviour change has been brought about by sport-in-development programs. Claims need to be supported by strong logic models, systematic M&E, robust impact measures, accounting for the relative contribution of other factors in achieving changes in behaviour.</p>

Adapted from Coalter (2008)

1.3 Report Outline

The report is organised in the following way:

- Section 2.0 briefly outlines the method undertaken to capture data for this review;
- Section 3.0 describes the 'state of play', that is, the contextual factors that influence sport-for-development in Tonga. There is a distinction made between Macro, Meso and Micro levels to clearly highlight those factors the NRL has limited control over (i.e. Macro level) and those that are more readily influenced;
- Section 4.0 presents key findings related to program progress and outcomes; and
- Section 5.0 provides summary and concluding comments to be considered in program development moving forward.

2.0 Method

2.1 Research Aims

The aim of this research project was to undertake a qualitative research evaluation of the League for Life program in Tonga to understand emerging outcomes, progress and challenges, since the inception of the program in this region in 2015.

2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected for this research project through qualitative research methods, including individual interviews and focus groups with representatives from organisations and relevant government departments in sport, education and community development contexts. Surveys completed by teachers and development officers (DOs), and stories of change completed by students after they experienced the program complete the suite of data collection tools.

Interview data was collected during an in-country visit by La Trobe researcher Associate Professor Emma Sherry, with an NRL representative present at most interviews/focus group sessions. In total 20 research interviews and focus groups were undertaken with over 25 individual Australian and Tongan stakeholders.

2.3 Data Analysis

All qualitative data were organised in NVivo 10, a software package designed to assist in the organisation of qualitative data for analysis. A framework of sport management, sport development and community development concepts and theory provided a broad framework to help the researcher understand the qualitative data collected for this report.

The themes presented here were arrived at through a systematic coding process, including a broad read through, a search for recurring concepts and patterns, and then a grouping together of recurring concepts and patterns into themes to make sense of the data and address the research aims of this evaluation.





3.0 State of Play: Contextual Factors Influencing Sport-For-Development in Tonga

This section presents an overview of contextual factors influencing sport-for-development in Tonga. These factors provide the overarching background for program implementation.

The contextual factors surrounding development programs can facilitate, or inhibit, the progression of sport-for-development activities, and in turn, the outcomes hoped for (Minikin, 2009). These factors are presented first because of the potential influence they have over program implementation and evolution.

This section is broken down into the following subsections:

1. **Macro Level Factors:** The broad contextual factors affecting sport and education in Tonga, which the NRL has little to no control over;
2. **Meso Levels Factors:** The factors present in the direct operating environment of the NRL and the program, which the NRL may have some opportunities to influence and moderate; and
3. **Micro Level Factors:** The internal operating factors impacting on the effectiveness of the NRL and League for Life programming.

3.1 Macro Level Factors – Broad Context

- **Socio-cultural:** Attitudes towards women and domestic violence issues, respect in general (towards self and others) and a high rate of non-communicable disease (NCDs) are key contextual challenges that are present in Tonga. Tobacco use, alcohol consumption, low fruit and vegetable intake and low levels of physical activity are contributing to the 74% adult death rate from NCDs (Tonga Health Promotion Foundation, 2016). The obesity prevalence in Tonga is 68.7% among those aged 25-64 (60.7% men and 76.35 women). Furthermore, at the strategic level of sport governance in Tonga, there is strong resistance to develop women's sport participation, which is reflective of wider conservative views of women and their role in Tongan society. This is a significant barrier to wider issues associated with gender equity.
- **Education:** There are several factors that are pertinent in the educational context, including:
 - Low levels of English literacy, which presents a challenge for development officers who are encouraged to deliver programs in English;
 - Student disengagement is a prevailing issue, which creates difficulties in regards to reaching out to local children and encouraging them to attend school;
 - Large school class sizes are challenging for program staff and create issues associated with delivering engaging, participative experiences for students; and
 - There are limited physical resources available in schools to deliver both classroom and rugby-based activities.
- **Politics:** The Australian government and Tongan government are key partners of the program, which has had an influence on aspects of the program and continues to influence program priorities.

- **Sport:** Rugby Union is the most popular form of rugby in Tonga, which presents challenges for a Rugby League-based program. The popularity of Rugby League is increasing, however strong code affiliations still exist in local communities. Additionally, there is a lack of suitable and safe playing facilities, which creates logistical problems for program delivery and the wider growth of grass-root sport.
- **Geography:** Issues related to the geographic spread of schools, weather conditions and public transport make it difficult for program staff to access some school locations and operate programs/events in more rural areas.
- **Economic environment:** The communication links in Tonga are poor and people often don't have communication tools, such as mobile phones or email access. This is a large barrier when NRL staff are attempting to speak to schools/teachers and organise timeframes for program delivery. Often, deliverers have to attend each school in-person to book time and discuss program opportunities.

3.2 Meso Level Factors – Operating Environment

- **Local Rugby League Stakeholders:** The relationship between the NRL and the local stewards of Rugby League, the Tonga National Rugby League (TNRL) has been challenging. The TNRL board's strategic direction and overall functioning requires improvement, which has presented problems for the development of League for Life and the communication between NRL and TNRL. However, there have been improvements as a greater sense of trust has been established and TNRL has more clarity about the specific program goals.
- **Teacher Engagement:** The wider operational environment for teachers generates issues with program engagement and delivery. This does not apply to all teachers, however it does present a problem for continued delivery because of the central role ascribed to teachers in maintaining League for Life programs. Reasons for lack of engagement include:
 - Lack of confidence/time/ideas to prepare and implement aspects of their teacher training;
 - Lack of follow up and mentoring to support teachers in developing post-program training; and
 - Limited professional development opportunities for teaching practices.
- **Local Capacity for Junior Sport Development:** A lack of capacity for junior sport development is a compounding factor in wider rugby league participation structures. There is still a limited focus on foundational skill development for juniors (e.g. 6-12 years) and there is a lack of financial and human resources to develop these areas. There are also few facilities and safe spaces for children to continue participating after school hours.

3.3 Micro Level – Internal Operations

- **Educational Resources:** Connected with a lack of physical resources, it was highlighted that there are inadequate resources available in schools to deliver in-classroom sessions effectively. It was suggested that the provision of whiteboards or flip sheets would assist with visual demonstrations to large class sizes.
- **Sporting Equipment:** There was a strong consensus that sports equipment is limited; with large class sizes it is difficult to have enough equipment to accommodate all of the children.
- **Program adaptability and flexibility:** It was asserted that it is important to ensure the program is adaptable and tailored to different demographic populations in Tonga so the aims are as targeted and relevant as possible. For older youth groups it was suggested that a focus on career opportunities and potential pathways would be more beneficial than messaging around healthy lifestyles.



4.0 Pacific Outreach Program Progress and Stakeholder Ideas for Future Development

This section presents findings that relate to the progress achieved in Tonga since the inception of the Pacific Outreach Program and associated activities in this location. It also details key recommendations for program evolution and development.

4.1 Progress Achieved

There has been much progress across a number of different areas, including: program growth, social, sporting and educational outcomes, staff training/development, and with various stakeholder relationships. This section will be split up in the following way:

- Program aims and stakeholder engagement.
- Program outputs in terms of training (staff and school teachers) and delivery of sporting opportunities in schools via programming and gala days.
- The outcome areas (as they relate to the program aims) including, social and behavioural impacts, educational impacts and the development of the NRL's profile and reputation.

4.1.1 PROGRAM AIMS

Aims

The program receives funding from DFAT Innovation funding, corporate support and the NRL and is delivered in Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Fiji, however it is apparent that these nations have different requirements and unique challenges. Therefore, the aims of the Pacific Outreach activities in Tonga are reflective of the most pertinent socio-cultural issues, which is a key strength of the NRL's approach to ensure the programs are as targeted and beneficial as possible. In Tonga, the wider aims focus on health, lifestyle, gender equity (domestic violence), education and capacity building of rugby league in regards to organisational management and the overarching sport structure.

NRL and League for Life stakeholders remain clear that the program is an education program, not a sport program. This distinction is important to ensure staff and program stakeholders deliver the same messages advocated by the program. Respect, gender equity, healthy, wellbeing and the importance of education are the messages consistently delivered across all regions in Tonga. Other program stakeholders agree that the aims of the program are extremely significant to pursue within the socio-cultural context of Tonga.

"It's still huge the messages that we are delivering [about living healthy lifestyles], that's definitely the area to target yeah" (NRL staff)

"I already enjoy the NRL program because it's more focused on the young kids. That's where it starts. As well as trying to teach them playing footy as well. More importantly, it's important to understand nutrition and everything else" (NRL staff)

Stakeholder Engagement

Since the program was introduced in Tonga, NRL has established and cultivated key stakeholder relationships. Emphasis has been placed on community outreach and engaging with external organisations to deliver and embed messages of the program. Partnerships to build the reputation, visibility and public profile of NRL in Tonga have also been founded. Fundamental relationships and areas of progress are outlined below:

- **Community outreach and engagement, including teachers and parents** – The NRL brand and the synergy elicited in local communities is a pertinent aspect of the program. It has been highlighted that rugby union has a strong presence in Tongan communities, however increased NRL activity and exposure to the program is having a positive impact on rugby league interest and participation levels. Consequently, there is increasing demand from teachers and parents for the program to be delivered in particular schools.

“I just think because they want to play something. They want to be involved in something because the Rugby Union competitions are sort of dissipating and not as strong as they used to be. They don’t really care as long as they’re playing football. One type, one sort of code, most of them don’t care” (Australian Federal Police representative)

- **Australian Federal Police (AFP)** – The AFP Police have a presence in Tonga to assist with training the Tonga Police Force. The NRL have worked in partnership with the AFP to help deliver program messaging and a strong relationship has been established. The support of community partners helps to build the reputation of NRL in Tonga and affirm the importance of the program. A representative from the AFP highlighted the work between the two and wider perceptions of League for Life:

“That’s what’s gotten me involved. I’ve, from a domestic violence perspective, worked hand in hand with the team and the program, healthy lifestyle, across the whole thing really. We’ve called the police in from a healthy lifestyle perspective so they can learn and we can develop the police on the back what the NRL are doing here. Really, to be honest, it’s been great working together because you’ve got some great programs set up” (Australian Federal Police representative)

- **TNRL** – The NRL has developed its working relationship with TNRL. Initially, the NRL’s presence created tensions concerning the specific purpose of the program and how this would impact TNRL on a competitive organisational level. Furthermore, there were expectations over what funding would be made available for TNRL operations. These early concerns are exemplified below:

“You’re thinking how do they [NRL] fit in. They [TNRL] thought NRL will come in and invade the system and take over ... some people are still thinking along that line and NRL is coming to take over, but it’s time. We need to have the outreach program in the community more so there can be better understanding” (TNRL Chairman)

- However, as the NRL has worked more closely with TNRL and been able to relay the key objectives of the program the distinctions between the overarching aims of each organisation in Tonga have been clarified. Subsequently, there is now improved communication between the two and greater cooperation to achieve shared rugby league goals.
- There are continued concerns related to the TNRL board and strategic direction of the organisation. Several areas for improvement emerged from the interviews including, more efficient monitoring of accounts and systems, governance capacity of board members and the need for more dynamic ideas and processes. The NRL remains committed to working with the TNRL to assist with making organisational, policy and process improvements, however these are long-term change objectives that will take time to implement.

- **Department for Education** – The relationship between the NRL and the Government-led education department in Tonga has improved since the program was first introduced. Initially, concerns were raised about the focus of the program, with misconceptions about programming being concentrated on elite-level development. However, the NRL has worked hard to ensure the department understands it is a development-driven initiative with a key emphasis on social messaging. Furthermore, the NRL continues to work with schools to ensure they are aware of the program focus, aims and end goals to secure their support.

“Most important thing was breaking beyond the barrier which took 6 months with the education department to convince that our programs were worth-while and we’re not just going in to pick the elite athlete and that as I said took six months. A lot of hard work. I feel I’ve got a good rapport within the rugby league circles” (NRL staff)

- **Digicel sponsorship** – The NRL in Tonga is has partnered with Digicel as part of a wider Pacific agreement. Each Pacific in-country NRL team is responsible for liaising with Digicel to organise the investment, relative to ongoing programming and events. The sponsorship provides a significant investment to assist the NRL with delivering program activities and provides outreach opportunities into local communities. Digicel are able to increase their brand awareness and affiliate their brand with the pertinent social messages that are embedded in program philosophies. The specific details and challenges of this partnership will be explored in subsequent sections of the report

“I understand as a group why we’re [Digicel] involved and the extension of our brand across the region and the people it influences, it’s a good idea” (Digicel representative)

4.1.2 OUTPUTS

NRL Staff Training

The training and development of NRL staff was a priority from the inception of the program because all of the deliverers were drawn from in-country. Therefore all in-country staff have been significantly up skilled since the start of the program. There are ongoing training sessions, workshops, and ‘on the job’ learning opportunities for all program staff.

As previously identified at the start of the pilot phase of the program there was a lack of appropriately skilled staff available in-country, therefore staff training and development, to enable program delivery, was a priority from the outset. The NRL staff members have been significantly up skilled since the start of the program. There are ongoing training sessions, workshops and ‘on the job’ learning for program staff. Furthermore, the Tongan NRL team expressed their desire to continue building their professional and personal capacity. Training has been provided in the following areas: First aid, administration, game-sense delivery, monitoring and evaluation processes, program planning/management and conflict resolution. The key development outcomes that have been highlighted during this reporting period are discussed below:

- **Personal development and empowerment** – It was highlighted by program staff that their skills in a number of areas have increased since the start of their involvement. Subsequently, they feel a sense of personal empowerment and confidence to use these skills in other contexts. Furthermore, these are transferable skills and values that will contribute to their personal development and capacity outside of the working environment. The training opportunities provided by the NRL, social interactions and the development of new networks and relationships are all contributing factors to overall skill and capacity building. Indicative comments are provided below:

"To be honest, before I didn't really care about time management, things like that, but I have to work with NRL now. I know how to be organised and to plan ahead. That's what I learned the most and it's really helped to plan my University assignments and stuff" (NRL staff)

- **Professional development** – The training and learning opportunities provided via the program have allowed staff to build their professional capacity. Areas of professional capacity building include event organisation, managing program timeframes, program delivery to a variety of audiences, administration and how to implement monitoring and evaluation processes. Indicative comments are provided below:

"In general it was all new [RL format] I had to study the rules, everything. Start from scratch, you know? Study rules, the games, everything. I took the rules and all the stuff and learned to mingle with new people because I used to play rugby union and rugby league was new so I don't play union anymore" (NRL staff)

- **Community role models** – NRL staff have become role models within the community, which helps to reinforce social messages, raises the profile of NRL in Tonga, creates strong connections between local communities and NRL, and ensures they are ongoing symbols of wider program aims.

"The reaction from the kids. That's really rewarding personally. Kids walking past the office yell out "Hi" whether you're there or not. Just little things like that" (NRL staff)

Teacher Training

It was highlighted that teachers in Tonga receive minimal professional development or further training opportunities after receiving their formal accreditation. Therefore, the training provided as part of League for Life is an important professional development opportunity. Furthermore, the training is offered to teachers that are not necessarily sport specialists, which creates an even greater scope for development and skill-related outcomes. The sessions address the social messaging of the program, alongside the practical skills and drills that are utilised. Therefore, it is a platform to reinforce program messages and to aid in wider teacher development.

Media and Communication

In Tonga, the NRL has attempted to build its presence in the region and association with League for Life by: 1) working with local stakeholders in the community to diffuse program messages; 2) communicating with different institutions (i.e. Government education department, TNRL, TNRL board); 3) starting to use social media channels; and 4) partnering with branded sponsors to increase visibility.

Evolution of League for Life program

The program has been delivered into a range of schools in this reporting phase. In Tonga, the program has evolved to meet the specific needs of the population. Therefore, the program has been adapted to focus on health, lifestyle and physical activity messaging. These are additional program messages, but vitally important in the socio-cultural context of Tonga, which has high levels of NCDs and limited education about health and nutrition.

"It's the wellbeing at the moment here [Tonga] that's important. Two reasons, one because of the messages but two, that's my introduction into the school and then we grow our league for life out of that program. I finally got permission from the education minister to do the wellbeing. Once I make contact with the schools and we have a rapport we extend. That's how that works. They go hand in hand. We turn a 3 week program into 7 weeks basically with the league for life" (NRL staff)

“The message of the NRL wellbeing is something that’s definitely needed here. The way that the NRL have gone about it and have got into the schools, over the next few years it will become something that hopefully teachers can take on board” (NRL staff)

Delivery of sporting opportunities

Program activities rugby league sporting opportunities to a variety of groups in Tonga that might not otherwise have the platform to participate. Women face a wide-variety of barriers to rugby participation in Tonga; League for Life actively targets women, which challenges existing social attitudes and provides a unique channel for their involvement. The program also targets disabled children and aims to make the sport inclusive for all.

“We’re seeing young girls involved in the program. We’re always trying to push more young girls to get involved. Yeah, we want to try to integrate it because it’s important to change attitudes” (NRL staff)

It also emerged during the data collection period that rugby union in Tonga is not as active in the community compared to previous years. Therefore, it was widely felt that this is a good opportunity for rugby league, as a sport, to increase participation numbers and expose people to the game. The program is contributing to the development of rugby league by delivering the sport in schools, teaching children about the sport and giving them a chance to get involved.

Progress in Development of Rugby League (RL) Capacity in Tonga

Contributing to the development of organisational and management capacity of RL in Tonga is partly related to the relationship between the NRL and the TNRL. This relationship is slowly developing, but it has taken time to build trust and mutual ground between the organisations, which has previously been outlined in this report.

This has continued to improve and there has been increased partnering since the initial implementation of League for Life. Media and communications is a key area that has benefitted, with assistance provided in communication strategies across a variety of platforms.

The NRL program is currently facilitating an increase in female participation in schools and through girls’ event days, which is imperative for starting to develop a female participation pathway. Furthermore, with the recruitment of female LDOs and DOs the program is providing opportunities for women in non-playing RL roles and building the capacity of women in this context.

4.1.3 OUTCOMES

NOTE: It should be noted that social and behavioural impacts/outcomes attributable to the League for Life program require a longer-term period for evaluation as they relate to social and behavioural change. It is likely that it will take several more years before it can be determined if these interventions have had a sustained impact on the individuals involved. Findings presented in this report should be interpreted accordingly.

Social and Behavioural Messaging

The social messaging delivered through the program and the long-term reinforcement of these messages is key to exposing children to alternative sources of knowledge and understanding. It has been highlighted by a wide-variety of stakeholders that the messaging supported by NRL in Tonga is pertinent for the nation’s wider socio-cultural context. All NRL staff talked passionately about what the program stands for and the underpinning social philosophies it promotes, and attempts to embed within school communities.

The **key social messages** delivered through the program are:

- **Health and wellbeing.** The messaging around healthy diet and lifestyle is important in Tonga. Education focuses on teaching children about the importance of physical activity, what constitutes a healthy diet and ways they can maintain healthy lifestyles.

"This is one of the key things that I've looked at with the NRL program is how it gets people to engage in the sport, how it gets people just turning up. I just see the benefit from a deeper perspective. You look at all the health programs, this is one of the best ones because it's really getting the message out there" (Australian Federal Police representative)

"I know that sports and health go together, but our people don't deeply understand how that works. They think that sports and health ... it's go out and eat as much as you like fill up your belly and that's it. With the program, healthy eating, there's something that goes together with the sports. Our people actually die with the non-communicable disease, diabetes and things, poor diet. I think it's great the health and education goes along together" (TNRL representative)

- **Gender equity.** Promoting the inclusion of girls and respect for their involvement is fundamental to the program. These messages are delivered via the program and through outreach programs that work with local women playing rugby league to build their capacity and encourage them to be part of the NRL. Creating female role models in the community helps to reinforce explicitly delivered messages. Raising awareness of domestic violence as a social issue in Tonga is also a key aspect of the League for Life program and connects with values associated with gender equity. Challenging domestic violence and raising awareness of the issue with children at a young age is, potentially, an effective intervention strategy.

"I think it's the way we [NRL staff] present. It's very relaxed. Straight away it's encompassing both the boys and the girls and straight away the boys realise that they're not going to get things all their own way because there's someone telling them to share with the girls" (NRL staff)

- **Social inclusion.** The program is an effective tool for promoting inclusive sports participation and ensuring equal opportunities for all, including disabled individuals. NRL team members adjust sessions to meet the needs of all children and demonstrate to teachers, parents and the wider community that such accommodations can be made.
- **Respect.** The program focuses on delivering different messages associated with respect, including both respect for self and respect for others. These are key points that are important within wider communities and feed into issues associated with gender equity.

Social and Behavioural Impacts

There are some initial social and behavioural impacts emerging from the program since it was first introduced in Tonga. To assess and understand long-term social change requires an extended period of data collection and engagement with children's parents, teachers and local community members. However, the significant aspects apparent from discussions with a range of stakeholders are outlined below:

- **Healthier lifestyle patterns** – NRL staff and program stakeholders stated that the children had exhibited healthier lifestyle choices and patterns after involvement with League for Life. This occurred by observing the children bringing water to sessions and packed lunches to school.

"We did a little kindergarten program and it all went to their sports day and all those kids had packed lunches" (NRL staff)

- **Interactional patterns between boys and girls** – Program staff and teachers commented that during and after the program there were more respectful interactions and a greater sense of

gender equity between the boys and the girls. This manifest in the boys showing more respect for girls, participating in activities together and being more co-operative. Out of a total of eight development officer surveys, all eight reported observing a significant change in the students' behaviour in and out of the classroom over the programming period.

"Yes, very unusual [for girls and boys to be playing together] but that's the first time for this school to be playing together the kids at the same time" (NRL staff)

"The girls bring it down to a level where the boys, once they participate the boys then realise that these girls are pretty good athletes themselves. Just that interaction between the boys and girls is important" (NRL staff)

- Furthermore, it was highlighted that a big challenge for the program staff are teachers' perspectives on girls and boys participating together. League for Life is an important vessel to challenge these ideas and wider values in Tongan society.

"The challenges there is changing the teacher's perspectives because, you know, some of the teachers don't necessarily agree with it [girls and boys participating together]" (Australian Federal Police representative)

"It's a contact thing and the women here are well respected by men and to see them running around in a pair of shorts and being all muscular and physical ... we're doing it in small incremental improvements. I'd like to see more women playing and programs that encourage this" (TNRL representative)

Education

It emerged that programming is assisting with education-related outcomes in several key ways by increasing the number of children attending school and also helping to improve their engagement with classroom-based activities. This has been observed by development officers and by classroom teachers. Out of thirteen surveys administered to teachers and development officers, all thirteen participants stated they had seen 'positive change' or 'a lot of positive change' in students' classroom engagement and school attendance. Teachers also discussed noticing 'some change' with regard to student performance and improvements in reading and writing levels.

Inclusive Program Delivery

One of the most important outcomes of programming is the **inclusion of all children** in the activities, both inside and outside the classroom. In the context of conservative views about women's participation in rugby league, it is an important aspect to program delivery and helps to challenge traditional thinking about 'appropriate' sports for women. The difficulties associated with this issues was strongly asserted during participant interviews:

"There's some female talent [rugby league] but still, that is a very difficult issue, we struggle with the police just getting gender equality in recruit classes. That's something that we work very, very hard on. It's actually a cultural attitude that has to change and it's going to take time" (Australian Federal Police representative)

NRL profile and synergy

The profile of the program is growing within the community and with local stakeholders as more schools receive the program and become involved with events organised by NRL. This is important to increase the profile of rugby league on a general level and disseminate the messages of League for Life to a wide-variety of audiences.

4.2 Areas for Development

The review of League for Life programming provided all stakeholders an important opportunity to provide feedback on ways it could be developed and improved moving forward. The suggestions covered the breadth of the program and some of these ideas offer solutions to challenges and ways to improve the impact of the program. These will now be outlined and have been grouped thematically according to the overarching area of focus.

4.2.1 NRL STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

It was highlighted that it is important to continue to invest in human resources to progress and develop current program staff members. Since program delivery started in Tonga the NRL have invested in training staff and providing ongoing professional development opportunities. However, there were some areas highlighted by program staff for future development opportunities:

- Management and leadership development
- Continued and ongoing professional development opportunities
- Administration

It was acknowledged that the NRL needs to continue building the capacity of staff in-country to ensure that there are clear pathways for development and succession routes. For a development program funded by the Australian government, with a clear focus on up skilling local communities, this is an important factor. The long-term capacity building strategy the NRL utilises to ensure program sustainability was highlighted by one stakeholder as being an effective model and ensures Tonga NRL have full ownership of the program.

"We need to get around that [maintaining sustainability] and it seems like the way the NRL has developed this program, they've actually overcome that. They believe in that direct mentoring, which I believe in as well, so on-the-ground mentoring intensely over a restricted amount of time and then a withdrawal. Identifying the right people and then a withdrawal but then monitoring from afar. I think it's a really good way of doing it rather than just money, money, money, money"
(Australian Federal Police representative)

4.2.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

It was recognised that there is a need for broader stakeholder engagement to embed the program in local communities, attempt to secure the longevity of League for Life and develop the work that has already been conducted.

Digicel sponsorship

The sponsorship from Digicel is a relatively new partnership that requires further work to ensure it is a success for both Digicel and the NRL. Several areas for potential development and improvement emerged from the participant interviews, these are:

- **Communication** – It was suggested that there could be clearer communication about the aims and expectations of each organisation so these are managed accordingly. However, due to the relatively new nature of the partnership these processes and understandings will take time to establish.

"I think from a head office point of view I think communication on both sides could be a little bit better as far as what we are obligated to do and I think I'm sensing the same from a Digicel point of view, they're not quite sure. I think our branding could be a bit more visible" (NRL staff)

- **Execution of investment** – It was noted that from the start of the partnership it took several months for the Digicel brand to be present on NRL uniforms and equipment. Such processes should be speedier to ensure the brand is able to leverage off NRL programming as quickly as possible.
- **Skill and experience** – Connected with the execution of investment, it was suggested that an individual with specific marketing expertise would be better placed to deliver on Digicel's investment components.

"We want it, but there's no one from the NRL's perspective helping plan and activate on the ground. We need a commercial and market person help us execute our investment and we don't have it" (Digicel representative)

- **Delivery of consistent mass-participation activities** – It was suggested that consistent, mass participation events would be an effective way to increase people's awareness of the Digicel and NRL connection, subsequently raising the profile of both.

"Just extend the brand, which is the reason for the NRL connection, it's a brand extension. Bring the people into the game. We're a brand that's going to help support that in the local market and promote it, organise funded completions that we plan well in advance so the community at large knows what we want to do in advance. Don't do it once, make sure it's something more often" (Digicel representative)

Parent and teacher engagement

The engagement of parents and teachers are factors that have emerged strongly from this evaluation phase and are important to help secure the long-term sustainability of League for Life. NRL staff and other organisations that have been involved with the program discussed the influence of children's family life on their behaviour. Therefore, attempting to work with parents to educate them about the program's messages will assist in reinforcing observed behaviour and attitudinal changes.

Furthermore, NRL staff highlighted the difficulties they faced when attempting to make contact with schools and gain support to deliver the program. Continuing to engage with teachers and educate them about the social messages embedded in League for Life's philosophy is vital to maintain consistent delivery to children and influence wider audiences. Securing accreditation from the Department of Education has assisted NRL staff with approaching schools and securing their initial buy-in, however it is important to maintain a close affiliation with relevant teachers/schools for long-term delivery. An indicative is provided below:

"We need the teachers participate more and for the schools to engage with the program" (Development officer)

Wider community engagement

The NRL have partnered with several different community organisations to reach out to local people and reinforce key program messages. There were suggestions made for further development, which are outlined below:

NCD nurses – To deliver more effective and expertise-driven health messaging, it was highlighted that partnering with NCD nurses would be productive. There are some preliminary plans in place for the NRL team to do this, however these require further refining and formalising.

"If we take a nurse along with us, a bit like yesterday when we saw the kids learning how to clean their teeth, the basic things we take for granted, but if we've got a nurse there and she helps us with our program that'll help our students and teachers but also help her reach out to more people" (NRL staff)

Health organisations – In relation to utilising NCD nurses, it was also suggested that building relationships with local community health organisations is a key area of focus moving forwards, particularly in relation to themes that are currently not discussed as part of League for Life, e.g. diabetes education.

“We’ve had very initial talks with the LSD group and them coming onto to the field to say they’re in a community doing diabetes. We don’t touch on diabetes but that’s something obviously we don’t touch on it because we don’t qualify too. If we got a nurse, questions like that pop up probably more in the high schools when we do our mentoring program, we’d better placed to provide quality education. We could have a little topic on those issues for the kids” (NRL staff)

Sport Stakeholders

Even though Tonga NRL has improved its relationship with TNRL, one of the key concerns that emerged from the data collection process was the governance of the TNRL. These concerns related to the accountability of the board, the transparency of auditing processes, national-level strategies and the development of sport structures and systems.

“What effects League for Life’s sustainability will be the board. If we’re talking about promoting rugby league in Tonga, the biggest ongoing challenge will be the board and attracting those people that are rugby nuts to rugby league. That will only occur through getting right people on the board to start getting residents involved in national teams and trying out tests here getting involved with Pacific games. That’s the only way that’s going to happen and that is going to be hard. That’s going to be a challenge” (Australian Federal Police representative)

Direct mentoring from the NRL and support to build the capacity, accountability and structure of the TNRL were suggested as ways to help improve the national-level body. However, these processes take time, rapport and the establishment of efficiently functioning partnerships.

“The governance side of NRL could support, it’s not just Tonga, but in the Pacific, and make them understand that you got to be accountable, you got to do this. If you don’t, then the Rugby League International Federation can take away your funding. At the moment they are not really concerned about the governance knowing that the International Federation are always going to give their grant every year as a handout” (NRL staff)

4.2.3 PROGRAM RESOURCES

Program staff identified the following physical resources that would be beneficial for the program moving forward, these are outlined below:

- **Education resources** – It was highlighted that portable whiteboards or flipcharts for in-classroom sessions would be beneficial for DOs. The poor resources in some schools means that often this type of equipment is not available, which makes it difficult to communicate and engage with full classes.
- **Sports equipment** – It was discussed that more equipment is required by schools to continue program delivery, particularly in schools that have larger class sizes to ensure that all children have equal access to participate.

- **Marketing resources** – Marketing banners, posters, or associated material were highlighted as potentially effective tools to increase awareness of program activities and messages. Such material could also be displayed whilst the program is being delivered to attract people's attention and create new community-wide associations between the NRL and these activities.

"More awareness banners or things like that we can use that people see. In Tonga I find that everything is visual. If the message is seen several times and delivered, people will take it on board. It changes their behaviour. At the moment we don't have that" (NRL staff)

4.2.4 PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders identified several areas of the program that could be developed and improved upon, which are outlined below:

- **Strategic long-term planning** – It was suggested that continual planning and the mapping out of schools would foster a systematic and structured development of League for Life. Ensuring there is a clear plan in place would also facilitate follow-up school visits and create consistency with the approach undertaken to these activities

"We need to plan more work and continuously. For example, if we do this school now, let's be down there for only 2 weeks in each school. We need to see what works after we've been there 2 weeks, what will help them or help us follow up, make sure that they do actually do the program and keep it moving forward" (NRL staff)

- **Program adaptability** – A flexible approach to program messages and tailoring these to particular youth populations was suggested as a potentially effective way to target the most pressing issues for different groups. Providing support and communicating with older youth groups about career options and challenging traditional expectations was highlighted as an issue that could be addressed by the program.
- **Expansion to rural locations** – There are logistical and geographical challenges that create difficulties for program expansion, however it was highlighted that the program needs to grow to continue the momentum that has been generated

"It's the same people, same amount of numbers. Why try something else, make it bigger. Not just the numbers, but make it bigger and reach more people in different areas. We need to plan like a good program" (NRL staff)

- **Raise program awareness** – As previously discussed, there is a need for more marketing resources at Tonga NRL events. This connects with the idea of raising program awareness and increasing the visibility of all programming.
- **Inclusion** – It was asserted that more community outreach events for disabled children, or engaging them with the programming in some way would be beneficial. Even if participation is not possible, partnering with relevant stakeholders and including these groups at relevant activities would help promote inclusiveness and provide new opportunities for disabled children.

"Even just picking them up and bringing them to watch the kids practice. Anything like that is good, some kind of activation, something for them to do, something to look forward to" (Digicel representative)

4.2.5 HUMAN RESOURCES

This section relates to improvements that were suggested in relation to the staffing of NRL in Tonga:

- **Administration** – League for Life has been successfully established in Tonga, subsequently the program is likely to now enter a growth phase after building awareness and establishing strong partnerships with relevant local and national stakeholders. Therefore, it was highlighted that a key area for human resource development is administration to develop processes and contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the program.

“I think here now we’re in a position where we probably need to go to another phase and that’s administration assistance where either we release some hours for someone to spend more time in the office, or we have another body on the field so that the manager can devote more time into the office. Originally, just having one person works but now I think with what we’ve got, we’ve got the reaction from the schools and the syllabus officer loves the program. It’s only going to get busier from here so we need to free up some administration time” (NRL staff)

- **Onboarding process** – It was discussed that the onboarding process for non-native NRL staff to adjust to new socio-cultural environments could be improved. Providing more information, resources and recommendations were the key factors outlined to make the adjustment period easier.

“I think we probably could train our people a little bit more on the actual destination, what’s required. Probably more research into actually where the chemist is. What’s the process if you are sick just things like that” (NRL staff)







5.0 Summary and Concluding Comments

This evaluation report commenced with a discussion of the wider contextual factors that are present in Tonga, which could impact NRL's League for Life program. Tonga is a very unique context; there is a requirement that this is fully understood and accounted for when implementing and progressing a development program. The factors operating at the Macro, Meso and Micro level will be briefly outlined below to reinforce the potential effects of these on programming and outreach activities:

- At the Macro Level, there are a variety of factors that need to be considered as part of ongoing programming. These are grouped according to socio-cultural, educational, political, sporting, geographic and economic geographical factors.
- At the Meso Level, there were some difficulties associated with teacher engagement, which is an ongoing problem the NRL is addressing. The wider operational environment for teachers generates issues for program delivery. Additionally, the capacity of local rugby league could potentially influence the long-term sustainability of the program and ensuring it is continually delivered in schools.
- At the Micro level, there were issues with the physical resources that are available. It was emphasised that there are inadequate resources in schools for in-classroom sessions. There is a need to provide ongoing program support for teachers and to liaise with external stakeholders more regularly to keep them updated about program developments/outcomes.

Areas of progress and outcomes

Since the program commenced in Tonga, there have been a number of areas of development and specific program outcomes. The NRL has successfully established an operational team and provided opportunities for ongoing capacity building. Key stakeholders have been engaged with and good working relationships have been founded to ensure the program can continue to grow and leverage off these partnerships. The main areas of progress that have emerged during this evaluation phase are:

- **Refinement of programs aims** to ensure these reflect fundamental socio-cultural issues in Tonga.
- **Stakeholder engagement** including community groups, teachers, parents, the AFP, TNRL, Department of Education and Digicel.
- **Training provision** for staff and teachers; **personal and professional development** of the NRL Tonga team.
- **Delivery of sporting opportunities** to groups and individuals that might not otherwise have the opportunity, including disabled individuals, girls at school and women in the community.
- **Social and behavioural messaging**, with a specific focus on health and wellbeing, gender equity, social inclusion and respect, which are fundamental issues in Tongan society.
- **Social and behavioural outcomes**, including healthier lifestyle patterns, the interaction between boys and girls in a rugby league context and the inclusion of all in the program to challenge 'traditional' thinking about the capabilities and expectations on of these groups.
- **Promotion of rugby league**, the program is a catalyst for raising the profile of rugby league in Tonga and shaping the image of the game to ensure it is inclusive and has a good reputation in local communities.

Areas for development

There were some key areas for development that were raised by program stakeholders and also NRL staff. These are summarised below:

- **Further training** of NRL staff and establishing clearer development pathways.
- **Stakeholder engagement**, including Digicel and improving the execution of investment, parents/teachers, the wider community (particularly community health organisations and workers) and TNRL to build the capacity of the sport organisation.
- **Program resources** and the provision of education resources, sport equipment and marketing material for more effective visibility.
- **Develop the program** by improving the long-term plans that are in place, adapt the aims to meet the needs of particular youth populations, expand to rural areas and continue to raise community awareness.
- Allocate more time and/or resources for **administration** congruent to the expected program growth (and associated activities) to ensure current NRL staff have the capacity for all tasks.

Overall, the review of League for Life in Tonga indicates the significant development that has occurred in this region since programming commenced. The overarching aims of the program have been tailored to fit with the unique socio-cultural issues that are present in Tonga and require addressing. This demonstrates the malleability of the program to react to local needs and ensure it is providing the necessary community support. Stakeholder relationships have been established and continue to be strengthened, which is imperative for the longevity of the program. League for Life promotes rugby league and could be a key tool to help grow the sport in Tonga, alongside delivering outcomes related to the social development aims. Initial attitudinal and behavioural impacts are emerging and highlight the positive changes that are being instigated by the program. Furthermore, the staffed positions offered by the NRL assist with building capacity and upskilling local people. Now the program has been successfully founded, the potential challenges to overcome relate to growing the program in an efficient way, engaging the wider community and relevant stakeholders, changing the perceptions of teachers and parents, managing ongoing partnerships, and securing sustainability and viability.



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