

DevInfo in Action

Papua New Guinea: Using DevInfo to Teach Demography and Population Analysis

Editor's Note: This is the first installment in a three-part series on DevInfo implementation in Papua New Guinea.

Inside the computer lab at the University of Papua New Guinea (PNG), students work on their assignments with focused intensity. One concentrates on generating data for an MDG-related question, while another wrestles with how to best format a map.

All are undergraduate students majoring in the university's Demography and Population Studies Programme, enrolled in the popular third-year course titled, "Computer Applications in Demography and Population Analysis." The DevInfo software is the core subject of the course.

The innovative course is the brainchild of Eleina Butuna, Lecturer in Demography and Population Studies, who first became acquainted with DevInfo after attending the first in-country DevInfo training workshop in 2006.

"After the workshop, I became very interested in the DevInfo software," explains Ms. Butuna. "As the official MDG monitoring tool, this software obviously had national implications – something that I felt that the students in our programme would benefit greatly from learning."

Ms. Butuna shared her thoughts with officials at the UNICEF Country Office and the PNG Department of National Planning and Monitoring (DNPM), who concurred that learning DevInfo would be a definite asset for graduates seeking to gain experience in using technical tools.

Encouraged by their feedback and support, she submitted a proposal to the University Council for a new course offering within the school's Demography and Population Studies



University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, PNG



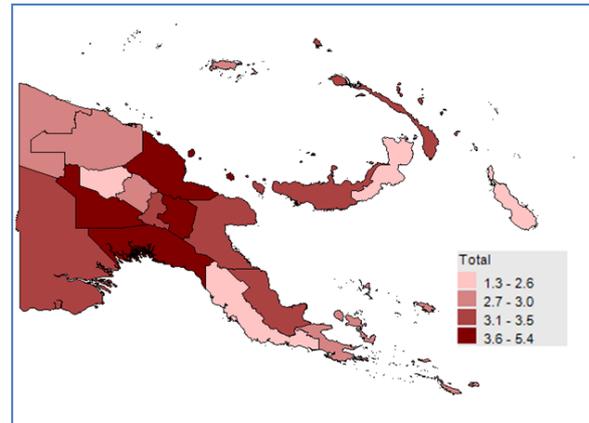
Eleina Butuna working with DevInfo



Official opening of the Demography Computer Laboratory, University of Papua New Guinea, March 2009

Programme. The Council approved her submission, UNFPA and DNPM provided funding to set up a new Demography Computer Laboratory, and Ms. Butuna began teaching this course in 2008.

“The course has been offered every year since 2008,” shares Ms. Butuna, her excitement evident in her voice. “On average, 15 students are enrolled every year. Most come in with no computer experience at all, so they are very eager to learn any kind of computer skills – anything to help them get equipped with tools for the field.”



Average annual population growth rate, 1980-1990

Out of the 60 students who have taken this course and graduated, several have reported that their acquired database skills have proven useful in subsequent employment with the Department of National Planning and Monitoring, the Department of Education, and the Department of Environment.

The course has been met with such success that the University has recently approved plans to begin offering a second follow-up course starting this year: “Introduction to MDGs and Human Development.” This new course “will focus on the DevInfo Data Administration software, so students can learn to create their own databases, whereas the original course focuses on the DevInfo User software as a monitoring tool,” she explains. Additional funds needed to maintain the Demography Computer Lab have already been provided by UNDP in 2011.

Ms. Butuna’s greatest joy? “To see my students enjoying this course so much,” she replies with a grin. “Once they enter the lab for their weekly three-hour computer session, they don’t want to leave at all!”

Data making a difference.

For more information, please contact Eleina Butuna, Lecturer in Demography and Population Studies, University of Papua New Guinea, at ebutuna@gmail.com.