The cascade model involves the delivery of training through layers of trainers until it reaches the final target group. This approach to training was utilised during the UNDP/UNESCO Pacific Educational Management Project (1990-1992) and during Phases One and Two of the current UNDP/UNESCO/UNICEF/AusAID Basic Education and Life Skills (BELS) Programme.

The BELS Programme through the Primary and Literacy Education (PALE) Module was given the mammoth task of uplifting the quality of basic education through the inservicing of primary school teachers, parents and members of the community. Objectives set were:

1. Strengthening the primary headteachers' skills in clinical supervision and professional leadership that would directly improve teaching practice and learning in the classroom. (Through the Classroom Skills Component)

2. Strengthening links between the schools and families and communities they serve. (Through the Community Support for Education Component)

3. Upgrading skills in literacy education for approximately 5000 primary school teachers, preservice trainees, community support personnel and parents. (Through the Literacy Education Component)

Mr Fred Griffiths of the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States and others who helped with the formulation of the Programme Document were convinced that, in order to reach out to approximately 12,000 teachers, who often taught in difficult and isolated locations with limited resources, the cascade model of training was the best available strategy.

Structurally the model looks like this:

There are certain requirements that need to be built into the model to make it functionally effective and efficient. These are:

1. Having a team of national resource persons (NRPs) representing the various sections of the Department/Ministry of Education - curriculum officers, teacher trainers and members of the field staff. This ensures that all relevant inputs are accommodated in the training material and to a certain extent, enhances uniformity and sustainability.

2. Selecting an adequate number of trainers from the best people available.

3. Ensuring that the training material is the best that can be prepared - the language, content and teaching aids are "right".
4. Ensuring that all information is provided early to all involved to enable proper preparation to take place.

5. Attempting at all times to make the delivery of the training material and the actual training interesting and participatory and giving adequate time for thorough coverage of the material.

6. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure that understanding and quality are guaranteed at all levels of training. A regular flow of information throughout the training structure should be maintained.

7. At school level, headteachers need to understand the training requirements in order to support the activities, but a member of the staff with the appropriate expertise could be responsible for the actual training. Over time, this could involve several members with the headteacher as facilitator. This in itself is a sign of good leadership.

Other important aspects that need to be understood are that:

1. Short-circuiting of the sequence or order of training is possible. For example, the NRP's may also be the trainers directly responsible for the training of headteachers and/or school trainers. It is important to ensure, however, that any adjustment will bring about an improvement in the whole cycle of training, particularly in the monitoring and assessment requirements.

2. The quality of the trainers and the training material they present will to a very large extent influence the quality of learning/understanding by the participants.

3. At each level a cyclical approach to training needs to be followed to ensure that quality is maintained and dilution minimised. This is explained in the following diagram and is an integral part of any good teaching/training programme:

Some Advantages of the Cascade Model

1. In our island states, where many schools are widely scattered and isolated and where resources are limited, it is a cost-effective way of reaching out to teachers.

2. It gives a large number of people the opportunity to be trained and to be trainers - all part of professional development.

3. If given the necessary recognition and support by ministries/departments of education, it helps create the initiative among head teachers and teachers to become more responsible for their own professional development within schools and between schools in close proximity to one another. Organising training sessions where the expertise of all staff members is fully utilised, not only boosts the confidence and self-esteem of the individual teachers, but it also enhances the knowledge and experience of their colleagues.

Some Disadvantages

1. The model allows a high dilution rate, losing quality from level to level so that by the time the information reaches the final target group, it has lost some of its "real value".

2. Headteachers do not necessarily have the
appropriate skills. Related to this is the claim that head teachers are heavily loaded with a multiplicity of responsibilities and just do not have the capacity to take on more.

3. Proper monitoring and assessment of activities are not possible and there is no way of fairly measuring teacher performance on a comparative basis - against one's own performance and against others.

It has been suggested, therefore, that the solution lies in the establishment of a national team responsible for all aspects of training. I believe the answers to the problems lie within each Department/Ministry of Education - a matter of proper selection and prioritisation of limited resources. Perhaps our readers may like to examine the following questions and, based on their own knowledge and experience, arrive at their own decisions:

1. Do our island states have the human and financial resources to support a full-time national training team?

2. If not, what then is the best alternative?

We welcome the views of regional colleagues, especially on strategies they have used to overcome their training problems. I am also confident that there are many success stories available from which we all can benefit.