

## Basic Education Quality and Access in Laos Program (BEQUAL) Phase 2 Mid-Term Review Management Response

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) welcomes the BEQUAL Phase 2 Mid-Term Review (MTR), its findings, and recommendations. This Management Response outlines DFAT's approach to addressing the recommendations, with implementation planned from July 2025 to June 2028. The actions reflect DFAT's commitment to strengthening the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of the BEQUAL program in close partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the BEQUAL team, and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Implementation of the response will be a joint effort by the Education Team at the Australian Embassy in Laos, MoES, BEQUAL, and TAG, ensuring coordinated and collaborative progress towards improved teaching and learning outcomes in Lao primary education.

### 1. Design: relevance and coherence of scope and approach

| Recommendation   | Response | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities   |
|--|----------|--|--|
| 1.1. Recommend BEQUAL focus on a smaller set of high-impact initiatives, particularly those with strong potential to drive systemic educational reform.  | Agree    | <p>DFAT – with support from the TAG and in consultation with the Lao PDR MoES – will work with the BEQUAL team to:</p> <p>1.1.1. Review and prioritise current and proposed BEQUAL activities to identify those with the greatest potential for systemic impact.</p> <p>1.1.2. Engage in collaborative planning involving the Embassy Education Team, TAG, MoES, and the BEQUAL team to refine the program's focus during the design extension process.</p> <p>1.1.3. Develop the BEQUAL implementation plan to reflect a streamlined set of high-impact initiatives for the remainder of Phase 2 and the extension period, with endorsement from the BEQUAL Steering Committee.</p> | <p>DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL</p> <p>DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES</p> <p>DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES</p> |
| 1.2. Recommend the Embassy Education Team and BEQUAL work together to leverage Australia's role as a trusted partner to enable policy development and harmonisation, and ensure BEQUAL's support aligns with MoES' evolving needs. | Agree    | <p>DFAT – with support from the TAG – will continue to work with the BEQUAL team to:</p> <p>1.2.1. Have a joint prioritisation process with MoES to identify evolving needs and priority areas in the new education sector plan, ensuring that BEQUAL support remains relevant and responsive during the extension phase.</p> <p>1.2.2. Use the regular bilateral meetings with MoES to build on good progress made to date in strengthening alignment and harmonisation of relevant policies supported by BEQUAL, including in the teacher continuing professional development (CPD) space.</p>   | <p>DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES</p> <p>DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES</p>                          |

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|---|----------|--|-------------------------|
|   |          | 1.2.3. Continue coordination among stakeholders in teacher CPD, supporting evidence-based decision-making, and promoting coherence in donor engagement through ongoing collaboration with MoES and other partners through Education and Sports Sector Working Group (ESSWG) mechanism.   | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES |
| 1.3. The Review recommends a design extension for the BEQUAL program be undertaken.   | Agree    | DFAT has initiated the process for a design extension of the BEQUAL program, with the intention to extend the program through to June 2028.  | DFAT, BEQUAL            |
| 1.4. As part of the design extension, revise the program logic to more explicitly map pathways of change and integrate key factors such as policy shifts and gender equality at the EOPO or IO level.               | Agree    | DFAT is working with TAG and the BEQUAL team to update the program logic, clearly articulating pathways of change for the program to June 2028 and integrating a gender equality objective at IO level.  | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL       |
| 1.5. Recommend BEQUAL, the Embassy Education Team and development partners direct their coordination and harmonisation efforts to support the MoES in managing resources and streamlining processes and activities. | Agree    | BEQUAL and DFAT will continue to use ESSWG mechanisms as an established forum to support MoES in aligning resources from government and development partners to support CPD. In regards to CPD, since the MTR data collection, coordination and harmonisation efforts have progressed well. DFAT and BEQUAL will continue collaborating with development partners to expand CPD implementation, including through the Global Partnership for Education's support in 40 MoES target districts and the World Bank's Frontline Workers project in 30 additional districts. BEQUAL-developed CPD resources are available to all stakeholders to support the expansion of CDP beyond BEQUAL target districts. | BEQUAL and DFAT         |

## 2. Implementation: effectiveness

| Recommendation  | Response | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities |
|---|----------|--|------------------|
| 2.1. BEQUAL and the Embassy Education Team to support the MoES to refine the CPD system, drawing on BEQUAL's CPD approach, positive practices from the cluster-system and other CPD models. To embed ownership of one CPD system, | Agree    | Drawing on BEQUAL supported CPD approach in target districts, BEQUAL is supporting MoES to finalise the CPD Guidelines which will outline clear processes and stakeholder responsibilities for implementing CPD activities across locations. | BEQUAL           |

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| MoES should be supported to finalise the CPD Guidelines, building on the framework of the CPD Decree and Concept.   |          |  |                  |
| 2.2. BEQUAL to review and streamline monitoring processes, strengthen CPD-Internal Pedagogical Support (IPS) coordination and provide targeted support for multigrade teaching to ensure equitable access and sustained improvements across all target districts.   | Agree    | BEQUAL will explore opportunities to support MoES to develop a streamlined CPD monitoring system during the extension period, ensuring consistent sharing of lessons and learning. Multigrade teaching is being addressed as part of CPD resource development and as part of IPS capacity development.   | BEQUAL           |
| 2.3. Once the CPD alignment issues are resolved, BEQUAL and the Embassy Education team should collaborate with the MoES to identify opportunities for sustained resourcing support for CPD.   | Agree    | Once the CPD Guideline is approved, DFAT and BEQUAL will advocate for the development of a holistic CPD system. This includes linking CPD to teacher appraisal processes and integrating CPD tracking into the CPD Management Information System to ensure teachers are appropriately incentivised to participate in CPD activities. The CPD Guideline will also formalise the use of school block grant to support CPD school-based activities.   | BEQUAL and DFAT  |
| 2.4. BEQUAL and the Embassy Education Team to support MoES to decentralise responsibilities to District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB) and Provincial Education and Sports Services (PESS), adapting and integrating BEQUAL-supported tools into MoES' systems, and advocating for dedicated budget allocations at subnational level. | Agree    | The CPD Guideline will formalise the use of a dedicated government budget line for CPD activities at the provincial, Teacher Training College (TTC), and district levels. This is a critical step toward enabling decentralisation of responsibilities to DESBs and PESS. In parallel, BEQUAL will continue to share lessons learned from the implementation of CPD district grants with MoES and development partners. These efforts will contribute to adapting and integrating BEQUAL-supported tools into MoES systems and advocate for sustained and appropriate budget allocations at subnational levels to support effective and locally driven CPD implementation. | BEQUAL and DFAT  |
| 2.5. BEQUAL and DFAT to promote coherent assistance by development partners, strengthening established forums to align resources and building MoES' capacity to manage and direct complementarity of resources. (see R1.5)  | Agree    | See Management Response 1.5 above.   | BEQUAL and DFAT  |

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| 2.6. BEQUAL and the Embassy Education Team to facilitate and improve coordination between MoES and development partners to align resources, strengthen capacity at provincial and district levels, and integrate monitoring and evaluation into MoES systems for sustainability.   | Noted    | While direct facilitation and coordination between MoES and development partners is beyond the immediate control of DFAT and BEQUAL, we will continue to advocate for improved coordination through our role as co-chairs of the ESSWG, the Teacher Education Focal Group and the Informal Education Partners Working Group. Through these platforms, we will continue to support efforts to align resources, strengthen capacity at the provincial and district levels, and promote the integration of monitoring and evaluation into MoES systems to support sustainability.   | BEQUAL and DFAT  |
| 2.7. BEQUAL to be more responsive to DFAT's requirements for strategic communications and attuned to expectations of the content. DFAT to provide clear advice and instruction to enable BEQUAL to meet its communications responsibilities.   | Agree    | DFAT will continue to work closely with BEQUAL ensuring clear communication on expectations and requirements for strategic communications to enable BEQUAL to meet its communications responsibilities.  | BEQUAL and DFAT  |
| 2.8. Recommend BEQUAL continues to enhance collaboration with MoES to co-develop strategic communications, including by expanding outreach to provincial and district levels, establishing a feedback loop to collect input from stakeholders and recipients, and using digital platforms to share lessons and achievements. | Agree    | <p>The following actions will be taken to strengthen collaboration with MoES on strategic communications:</p> <p>2.8.1. Drawing on data from the BEQUAL monitoring system, BEQUAL will collaborate with MoES to co-develop fit-for-purpose strategic communication products that showcase and provide evidence of program achievements and effectiveness to MoES senior management.</p> <p>2.8.2. Mechanisms will be established to expand the outreach of these strategic communication products to provincial and district levels in a meaningful and accessible way.</p> <p>2.8.3. BEQUAL will strengthen existing mechanisms, such as TTC quarterly meetings, to collect and document feedback from stakeholders, and demonstrate how BEQUAL and MoES work together to respond to that feedback.</p> | BEQUAL and MoES  |

### 3. Gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI)

| Recommendation  | Response        | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities        |
|---|-----------------|--|-------------------------|
| 3.1. BEQUAL's design extension should ensure diverse linguistic practices are preserved and sensitively integrated into the program.  | Agree           | BEQUAL indirectly supports language diversity by promoting the provision of additional support for students with a home language other than Lao through supplementary oral Lao language skills development classes that position linguistic diversity as an asset in the classroom and encourages mother tongue use. Future opportunities in the design extension potentially includes helping the Research Institute for Educational Science (RIES) to build evidence to empower parents to engage in learning at home using traditional stories and songs, reinforcing students' learning in their native languages. The design extension will continue to identify ways to sensitively integrate activities to celebrate language diversity and promote the value of using mother tongue as a bridging language in the classroom to support learning across the curriculum. | DFAT, BEQUAL, MoES      |
| 3.2. BEQUAL should leverage the expertise of the newly appointed GEDSI Strategic Advisor to strengthen GEDSI integration across all program activities, build technical capacity within BEQUAL and MoES, and expand the evidence base for BEQUAL's GEDSI impacts.   | Partially Agree | DFAT will work with BEQUAL to ensure there is adequate expertise to strengthen GEDSI integration across program activities in alignment with DFAT's new international policies. BEQUAL will articulate how the program will build MoES capacity, based on the outcomes of the GEDSI analysis currently planned as part of the program extension preparation. These findings will guide a realistic and targeted approach to enhancing GEDSI integration in a sustainable and transformative manner.  | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES |
| 3.3. Enhance GEDSI integration across all MEL frameworks and tools.   | Agree           | BEQUAL's MEL system was reviewed by DFAT's GEDSI Adviser at the beginning of Phase 2, with recommendations provided on strengthening GEDSI integration. In consultation with the TAG GEDSI Adviser, BEQUAL will review and identify the necessary updates to integrate GEDSI across all MEL frameworks and tools, as appropriate.  | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL       |
| 3.4. Ensure the design extension fulsomely considers the degree of ambition intended for the program, and embed appropriate and relevant supports into implementation architecture, including by nominating a gender equality outcome at the EOPO or IO level within the program logic, consistent with Australia's | Agree           | Based on the outcomes of the GEDSI analysis, the program logic will be updated to include a gender equality outcome at Intermediate Outcome level to clearly articulate our targeted GEDSI ambition for BEQUAL in the extension period, consistent with Australia's International Development Policy commitments and Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy. The findings from the GEDSI Analysis will also support a stronger approach to mainstreaming   | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL       |

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| International Development Policy commitment.  |          | GEDSI across each of the current Intermediate Outcomes, and the program logic and GEDSI Strategy will be updated accordingly.  |                         |
| 3.5. Enhance disability inclusion by strengthening partnerships with Organisation for Persons with Disabilities, and ensuring adequate support and remuneration for their participation.  | Disagree | We disagree with the finding that BEQUAL lacks systematic engagement with CSOs and OPDs. Steps have already been taken by BEQUAL to strengthen partnerships with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). A “Disability Reference Group” was established in December 2022 to engage OPDs in programming, with appropriate remuneration and accommodations to enable meaningful participation. For example, OPDs have contributed expertise on 'Understanding Disabilities' training materials through the Reference Group, which will be integrated into TTCs' CPD activities. BEQUAL will ensure strong engagement with these partnerships continue.  | BEQUAL                  |
| 3.6. The design extension should explore how to improve formal disability inclusion advisory and representation in future programming, in line with Australia’s International Development Policy commitments and the new Disability Equity and Rights Strategy. | Agree    | <p>The design extension will:</p> <p>3.6.1. Outline clear intentions and possible approaches to strengthening formal disability inclusion advisory representation. These may include strengthening engagement with disability technical advisory organisations.</p> <p>3.6.2. Support the Inclusive Education Promotion Centre to bring in other disability-focused partners to the implementation of the national Inclusive Education Strategy.</p> <p>3.6.3. Advocating to the Ministry’s Executive for cross ministerial support for the implementation of the national Inclusive Education Strategy.</p> <p>3.6.4 Facilitate representation of OPDs in mainstream education sector working groups, not just the DIDWG.</p> | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL, MoES |
| 3.7. BEQUAL should review and update the protections in place for women who are required to travel alone to participate in BEQUAL activities.   | Agree    | Measures are already in place, such as enabling staff from Teacher Training Colleges to travel in pairs when supporting schools. BEQUAL will continue to monitor the implementation of these measures and explore safety concerns, particularly for female Internal Pedagogical Support providers, to strengthen protections where needed.   | BEQUAL and MoES         |

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| 3.8. All new BEQUAL curricula and training materials should undergo a comprehensive review process before finalisation and distribution to ensure that they do not include content that depicts violence against children or models inequitable gender relations. Wherever possible, BEQUAL should also review and revise existing materials to remove any violent or inequitable content. | Partially Agree | The images identified by the MTR team date back to the early stages of curriculum development, before BEQUAL Phase 2. Since then, the program team and RIES have made significant progress and already have a system in place, with appropriate measures integrated into the now-completed process. BEQUAL will ensure future materials do not include images depicting violence against children or reinforcing gender inequality.   | BEQUAL           |
| 3.9. BEQUAL's new GEDSI Adviser should review and revise the GE&IE Assessment Tool, Scoring Workbooks, and associated Scoring Criteria to ensure that no harmful content is admitted into learning materials.  | Agree           | We acknowledge that the GE&IE Assessment Tool, Scoring Workbooks, and associated Scoring Criteria were developed in direct response to concerns about potentially harmful content in Grade 1 and Grade 2 textbooks during BEQUAL Phase 1. In subsequent curriculum development for Grades 3 to 5 during BEQUAL 2, BEQUAL strengthened its approach by introducing these tools to help ensure that no harmful content is admitted into learning materials. The Strategic GEDSI Adviser and BEQUAL Management team will re-review the tools to maintain the rigour and relevance of this approach in 2025-26. | BEQUAL           |
| 3.10. Next phase of BEQUAL should exclude addressing forced or child marriage from its objectives.   | Partially Agree | Child Early and Forced Marriage requires a multi sectoral response, of which the education sector has a critical role to play. DFAT is aware that there are other stakeholders currently operating in this space in Laos and the region more broadly. As such, while not an objective under BEQUAL, DFAT and BEQUAL will increase engagement with these stakeholders during the extension period with a view to identifying if and how BEQUAL could/should support Child Early and Forced Marriage in the future.   | DFAT, TAG        |
| 3.11. BEQUAL's design extension should actively explore ways to incorporate messaging, training, and support age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, including menstrual hygiene management.  | Partially agree | The opportunity to directly integrate age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) into curriculum content has passed - given BEQUAL's curriculum development support has concluded - the program remains committed to promoting inclusive and gender-responsive education.   | DFAT, BEQUAL     |



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|  |                 | Although the design extension does not include scope for further curriculum revisions, BEQUAL will explore opportunities to incorporate relevant messaging and support through teacher training, classroom practices, and CPD training materials. Where feasible, DFAT and BEQUAL will also seek to collaborate with Towards Universal Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights in the Indo-Pacific program and other initiatives working on CSE and MHM to ensure a coordinated and complementary approach that supports system-wide progress in this area.   |                   |
| 3.12. BEQUAL should consider shifting its GEDSI coordination to the IEPC and clarify MDAW's role to streamline partnerships and enhance systemic impact. | Partially agree | <p>BEQUAL has built a strong and productive relationship with MDAW and there are opportunities to make systemic impact with this partnership. For example, BEQUAL have been closely engaged with MDAW to provide appropriate technical inputs into the draft ESSDP 10 and MDAW have asked for BEQUAL's support with the implementation of their priorities once the plan is approved.</p> <p>We note this recommendation and will explore how to strengthen collaboration with IEPC, particularly in light of its recent move to the General Education Department. This will support IEPC's mandate to 'support, monitor, inspect and evaluate the progress made in the implementation of Inclusive Education Strategy on a regular basis', as per Laos Inclusive Education Plan.</p> | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL |

#### 4. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)

| Recommendation   | Response | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities  |
|--|----------|--|-------------------|
| 4.1. BEQUAL should simplify assessment forms to improve usability for teachers and continue to build the evidence base for its models, particularly the Spoken Lao Program, to strengthen policy dialogue with MoES. | Agree    | As part of the Spoken Lao expansion in the extension period, BEQUAL will review and simplify assessment forms to improve usability for teachers and continue to build the evidence base for its models, and to strengthen policy dialogue with MoES on language diversity. | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL |



| Recommendation  | Response        | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities  |
|---|-----------------|--|-------------------|
| 4.2. The Embassy Education Team and TAG could explore deeper TAG engagement in MEL to support independence and contestability on program performance tracking and decision-making.  | Partially Agree | DFAT agrees that TAG has a role to play in MEL, however it considers current level of engagement to be adequate. We will ensure TAG continues to play an active advisory role in supporting BEQUAL's strategic-level MEL, providing appropriate independence and contestability in assessing program performance. TAG will continue to engage at key strategic points of BEQUAL's MEL system, including the EOPO level and broader program-level MEL, as appropriate, to ensure robust oversight and evidence-based decision-making. | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL |
| 4.3. Recommend the BEQUAL design extension revises the program logic to include a policy influence and gender equality-specific EOPO or IO.   | Agree           | The program logic will be updated to add IO4 for gender equality and existing IO3 will be updated to include support to MoES to inform policy on performance management and teacher workforce linking to national CPD approaches.  | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL |
| 4.4. Recommend BEQUAL establish feedback mechanisms for program stakeholders and recipients, and address current imbalances in reporting by including both challenges and successes in official communications with DFAT and GoL. | Agree           | BEQUAL will strengthen its feedback mechanisms by using the quarterly TTC meetings to gather and respond to stakeholder feedback. A process will be established to ensure feedback from MEL activities is regularly shared with DTE, relevant MoES departments, and DFAT. This feedback will be documented and tracked in BEQUAL reports, highlighting both successes and challenges to support continuous learning and program improvement.   | DFAT, BEQUAL      |
| 4.5. Recommend BEQUAL focus on building the evidence base for the effectiveness of its models and approaches, and demonstrating the program adjusts in response to feedback and changes in context.                               | Agree           | BEQUAL will use existing governance mechanisms to regularly communicate both challenges and how they are being addressed. Key issues and outcomes will be documented in brief within reports. MEL data will be used to build evidence-based stories that demonstrate the effectiveness of BEQUAL's models and inform lessons learned for DFAT and other development partners.  | DFAT, BEQUAL      |

## 5. Management and governance

| Recommendation  | Response        | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities |
|---|-----------------|--|------------------|
| 5.1. Recommend BEQUAL develop a localisation strategy that will address barriers to national leadership in the program. | Partially Agree | BEQUAL has already developed a Local Participation Plan at the beginning of Phase 2. This document gets updated annually as part of the Annual workplan process. In response to this recommendation, BEQUAL will update this document and be more explicit in addressing barriers to national leadership in the program. | BEQUAL           |

| Recommendation  | Response     | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities    |
|---|--------------|--|---------------------|
| <p>5.2. Recommend BEQUAL strengthen and regularise contextual analysis, adopt a more flexible approach to program planning, and improve its use of data and feedback to inform strategic decisions, ensuring more timely adaptation to its dynamic operating context, and stakeholder needs, particularly DFAT.</p> | <p>Agree</p> | <p>DFAT will continue to stress the importance of strengthening the use of contextual analysis, data, and feedback and improving how this is communicated to support timely and strategic decision-making in a dynamic operating environment.</p> <p>BEQUAL has acknowledged that while contextual analysis has been conducted internally at both strategic and programming levels, these efforts have not always been visible to DFAT and the TAG. BEQUAL will take steps to ensure greater transparency and engagement moving forward. Specifically, BEQUAL will:</p> <p>5.2.1. Involve DFAT and TAG at key strategic points to share contextual analysis and receive input to inform decision-making.</p> <p>5.2.1 More clearly articulate how data, feedback, and contextual analysis shape strategic and programmatic directions in key documents, including annual workplans and progress reports.</p> <p>5.2.2 Adopt a more deliberate and flexible approach to planning, allowing for timely adaptation to emerging needs and evolving priorities.</p> | <p>BEQUAL</p>       |
| <p>5.3. Recommend BEQUAL Management Team adopt a more open communication approach with the Embassy Education Team, ensuring space is made to discuss program challenges and emerging opportunities.</p>   | <p>Agree</p> | <p>BEQUAL and DFAT will make more effective use of existing governance mechanisms to support open, regular discussions. Both parties will explore ways to reinvigorate and adapt engagement to maintain effective communication.</p>   | <p>BEQUAL, DFAT</p> |
| <p>5.4. BEQUAL and DFAT should re-evaluate the effectiveness of the new governance structure after it has been implemented for a 12-month period.</p>   | <p>Agree</p> | <p>BEQUAL and DFAT will re-evaluate the effectiveness of the new governance structure after 12 months of implementation.</p> <p>5.4.1. In the interim, BEQUAL will use existing mechanisms such as the quarterly BEQUAL Technical Meetings to identify key policy gaps affecting CPD system implementation and sustainability.</p> <p>5.4.2. TTC quarterly meetings will be used to surface local issues and explore local solutions for improving teaching and learning in target districts.</p>  | <p>BEQUAL, DFAT</p> |

| Recommendation   | Response | Action Plan / Comments   | Responsibilities  |
|--|----------|--|-------------------|
|  |          | 5.4.3. Continue to link BEQUAL governance meetings and the ESSWG mechanism to enhance policy alignment and strategic dialogue.   |                   |
| 5.5. Recommend BEQUAL, the Embassy Education Team, and the TAG work together to clarify expectations, roles, and responsibilities and enhance constructive, agile, and collaborative programming, ensuring more proactive engagement on policy issues and coordinated, strategic approaches to the Government of Laos. | Agree    | We note that this recommendation relates to the finding that the TAG's roles and responsibilities require greater clarity. BEQUAL, DFAT, and TAG will revisit and clarify TAG's role to ensure more proactive and strategic engagement. This includes at times using the TAG in an observer role, defining when and how TAG is involved (e.g. as observers or advisors), establishing regular updates and briefs on key program areas, and closing the feedback loop on reports to ensure clarity and shared understanding. These steps aim to support agile, collaborative programming and coordinated policy engagement with the Government of Laos. | DFAT, TAG, BEQUAL |