**Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) Mid-term Review, February 2015**

**Donor partner (Australia and the United Kingdom) management response to the Review recommendations**

The donor partners (DPs) support the broad findings of the MEC Mid-term Review (MTR). This response focuses on the MTR’s recommendations, in line with its forward looking nature.

We agree that a redefined MEC could play a critical role in delivering education services for the hard-to-reach in Burma and aim to identify the key recommendations required to achieve this. It is expected that MEC will in turn develop a management response to the MTR and this DP response, by the end of March 2015, which sets out the process for responding to the Review recommendations. A more detailed implementation plan will follow (including an updated log frame and theory of change). Additional funding for a redefined MEC will be contingent on Steering Committee approval of these plans.

1. **Retain existing management arrangements for a redefined MEC, with an updated management plan**

DPs agree with the MTR recommendation to retain current management arrangements through Save the Children and extend the program with a further refocused grants round in 2015 (“Option 3”). The extension and additional funding required for this option is however contingent on Save the Children Australia presenting a new management plan by the end of April 2015, which addresses the concerns raised in section 5.3 and 5.4 of the MTR. This should include clearer management lines, roles and responsibilities and accountability.

1. **MEC’s redefined purpose should be to deliver education objectives with clear thematic focus areas and/or geographic targeting**

DPs agree that the original scope of MEC lacked a clear focus, which has undermined MEC’s ability to respond to the rapid changes in Burma and engage strategically in the education sector. We agree that MEC’s purpose should be to deliver education objectives (including through civil society organisations) in clearly defined thematic focus areas and by geographic targeting. We support the priority areas identified in the MTR (ethnic education systems; complementary basic education; out-of-school children; and children with disabilities) but recognise that this represents a broad agenda and may require further prioritisation by MEC. As well as expanding into new areas, this will require MEC to shift away from some prominent areas of its current portfolio, including early childhood care and development (ECCD), and civil society strengthening (we recognise civil society strengthening may continue as part of engaging with new partners to meet the revised focus areas outlined in the review, however, it would not be a driving focus of a revised MEC).

1. **Increased role for technical expertise**

A redefined MEC represents a significant departure from the current portfolio and the Director’s ability to recruit high-quality technical expertise will be critical to success. In the short-term, MEC will need to contract technical experts to support the development of the implementation plan, alongside longer-term changes to MEC staffing structure. This will be particularly true of any work in ethnic education systems, an area that is both technically and politically complex. Given the importance of this technical expertise, the Steering Committee would expect to be involved in the preparation of key terms of reference and recruitment plans. Where NGO salary restrictions are likely to act as a constraint for securing the required level of expertise, alternative options should be considered for contracting arrangements.

1. **New implementation plan with revised Theory of Change and Log Frame**

MEC should develop an implementation plan and a new theory of change and log frame by July 2015. This should form the cornerstone of the programme’s implementation plan, outlining proposed strategic priorities, delivery mechanisms, staffing needs and sustainability plans. The successful grant funding mechanism will continue to play a role in MEC, but a broader mix of mechanisms will likely be required to respond to these new strategic priorities. MEC’s emergency assistance function should continue but be integrated into the broader grant management function. It will be important for MEC to consider how to balance the needs of the existing programming with the new priorities.

1. **Finalise governance structure and engagement with donors**

DPs have agreed to the new governance structure presented at the October 2014 Steering Committee but this needs to be finalised, with a new terms of reference. Without a co-located staff member in MEC, donors will be less involved in day-to-day activities (and rightly so) but this will require other mechanisms to ensure effective coordination. In addition to the Steering Committee, we propose a fortnightly update meeting attended by DPs and a MEC representative, alongside more informal two-way information sharing on emerging policy issues. This will be particularly important for MEC’s continued role as convenor and facilitator of civil society inputs into policy discussion with government as well as to ensure MEC is prepared to respond to progress in negotiations in the peace process.

1. **New ways of working for DPs**

DPs recognise that the shifts suggested here will place new requirements on donors, notably around compliance and risk appetite. This will particularly be the case with any increased support to ethnic education actors. There is strong interest within the donor organisations to increase our engagement with these actors and we will ensure that in-house specialist staff resources (e.g. conflict advisers, governance advisers) are made available to MEC during the design process. MEC needs to ensure efforts are made to maintain adherence to donor compliance requirements where this is feasible.