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# Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC)

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Mid-term Review

Final report

February 2015

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## List of acronyms

CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CBO	Community-based Organisation
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DfID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EiE	Education in Emergencies
Eoi	Expression of Interest
GoM	Government of Myanmar
HR	Human Resources
ICAI	Independent Commission on Aid Impact
ICR	Indirect Cost Recovery
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
KMSS	Karuna Myanmar Social Service
KTWG	Karen Teachers Working Group
KIO-ED	Kachin Independence Organisation Education Department
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEC	Myanmar Education Consortium
MEDG	Monastic Education Development Group
MILI	Myanmar Independent Living Initiative
MNEC	Mon National Education Committee
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid-term Review
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
QBEP	Quality Basic Education Programme
RFP	Request for Proposals
TA	Technical Assistance
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

# 1 Summary

## 1.1 Background

(Ref. Section 3)

The purpose of the Mid-term Review of the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) has been **to review progress against objectives, to assess the continued relevance of these objectives and management arrangements and to indicate future directions for the programme.** The Review was undertaken by independent international and national consultants supported by education and governance specialists from the two principal funding agencies.

The MEC is a programme (total value approximately AUD29.6m) **supporting non-government organisations to improve education access and quality.** It is currently scheduled to run from late February 2013 to the end of 2016. The bulk of the funding comes from the Australian and UK Governments, roughly shared on a three-quarters/one quarter basis. The Danish government has subsequently provided further funding. The programme is managed through a contract between the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Save the Children Australia. The MEC is implemented through a management team employed by Save the Children International in Myanmar.

MEC's work is concerned with Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), complementary education for children outside the government education system and alternative, non-formal education for out-of-school children. **ECCD is the largest activity area,** accounting for over 50% of expenditure. Two additional components of the programme are concerned with supporting civil society organisations to contribute in policy discussions with government and supporting civil society responses to emergencies affecting education. Crosscutting themes include gender, disability inclusion, child protection, sustainability and conflict sensitivity.

The programme has drawn together **three existing 'Founding Partner' projects.** The Founding Partner projects are: Save the Children's work in ECCD; World Vision's work in ECCD and non-formal education and Burnet Institute's work in monastic schools. These projects are due to close in March 2015. In addition, a number of **local partner civil society organisations (CSOs),** currently 13, have been receiving three-year grants from the MEC since June 2014.<sup>1</sup> Over 40% of the value of these projects is for work in ECCD.

As originally conceived, the programme, working in the non-government sector, was roughly aligned with the Quality Basic Education Programme (QBEP) operating with government through UNICEF. This **reflected the limited scope for externally funded support to education imposed by political constraints.** Now that Myanmar is changing rapidly these restrictions no longer limit donor support for education to the same extent. There is also a greater level of government acknowledgement of the contribution that non-state actors can make to education.

The MTR team relied largely on **qualitative assessment** methods in approaching the task of reviewing the MEC. This was partly because of the limited quantitative data available, but mainly because of the strategic and forward-looking nature of the MTR terms of reference.

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<sup>1</sup> The presumption is that the grants will be for three years, although they are currently contracted for only one year.

## 1.2 Findings

### 1.2.1 The problem of defining the MEC

(Ref. section 4.1 )

The Review found that there is **no clear consensus about what the MEC is and what it is trying to achieve**. This has generated continuing debate and revealed strong views and emotional investment amongst the principal players. The lack of consensus is reflected in the programme's foundation documents, which do not provide a clear and coherent vision for the MEC. The programme design is a confusing document and the Theory of Change and logframe are geared mainly to the Founding Partner projects.

**The context in which MEC is now operating is very different from the one in which it was designed.** The previously restrictive political environment limited the scope and ambition of the original components. MEC needs to adjust to the new opportunities that are now opening up.

The MEC has been variously regarded as a Civil Society development programme, a channel for advocacy and voice, an alternative education service delivery programme, a consensus based coalition, a multi-donor funding mechanism and a programme for educating hard-to-reach populations. The tendency to regard the MEC as 'all things to all men' makes its core purpose difficult to pin down, and this has been exacerbated by a 'rolling design' which has prolonged the debate.

**The end of the Founding Partner projects and the appointment of a new MEC Director are opportunities to re-establish the purpose of the MEC and to give it sharper focus.** This will involve moving away from 'Civil Society development' as a primary focus, because this is too broad a concept. It will also mean changing the focus away from education service delivery, because the impact of grant-funded projects is unlikely to be big enough to have a credible impact on large numbers of beneficiaries. A more useful approach is to look for impact in terms of innovation and systems development and through the demonstration of good practice. **Providing support to the education of hard-to-reach populations seems the most compelling rationale for the MEC.** However, at present, only a small proportion of MEC programming is with hard-to-reach populations and there is no coherent vision or strategy for working in these areas.

The difficulty in defining the MEC makes assessing progress a challenging exercise. Comments can, however, be made about the constituent parts with the caveat that, in the time available for the review, these cannot be regarded as a thorough evaluation.

### 1.2.2 Founding Partner projects

(Ref. section 4.2.1 )

During site visits, the MTR team witnessed some impressive achievements of the Founding Partner projects. From monitoring reports these projects seem **more or less on track to meet their logframe targets** in terms of numbers of beneficiaries and services provided. However, these targets were set at a time when the political context determined what was possible. They were not ambitious relative to need. The relatively small scale of the projects has meant that their impact on service delivery has been localised. Political circumstances determined that, for the most part, project sites are located for ease of access in geographically central areas, rather than in areas of greatest need around the periphery of Myanmar. This may, inadvertently, be contributing to an increase in the inequity of provision rather than a reduction.

The self-contained nature of the projects has meant that **the amount of learning they have generated that could be applicable elsewhere has been limited**. In all three cases, replicability will prove a challenge, because of the high cost of interventions concentrated on particular communities. There must also be some doubt about the sustainability of the development models adopted. Although all three projects attempted to build local community support, only the Burnet Institute project promoted a local service provider to carry the work forward beyond the lifetime of the project.

### 1.2.3 Grants Management

Ref. section 4.2.2)

**The MEC Management Team has done well to introduce a grants mechanism in a short period of time.** The process of following through expressions of interest and requesting proposals has been well managed. However, the selection of grant recipients and some of the MEC's compliance demands have created a degree of disappointment. Lessons need to be learned from the experience.

**The main lesson from the selection process is that in an imperfect market, competition does not necessarily produce optimal results.** The organisations that succeeded through the process were not exclusively those working with hard-to-reach populations. The thematic areas in which the grant projects are operating confirms the predominance of ECCD and yet in a country in which many children miss out on basic education, this is not the highest priority for an intervention of this sort. **More purposive targeting will be necessary in order reach target populations.** There are also lessons to be learned about the compliance and monitoring demands made by the MEC Management Team. Some of the data requirements included sensitive information and reportedly posed security risks to the CSOs involved. MEC faces a dilemma in finding a balance between the desire to support local organisations delivering to the hard-to-reach and the imperative to ensure efficient and cost effective grants stewardship and to minimise risk.

### 1.2.4 MEC support to Civil Society engagement in policy discussions

Ref. section 4.2.3 )

**The MEC Management Team has responded well to opportunities that have arisen to support Civil Society engagement in policy discussions.** It has participated in the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) process and has acted as a promoter and convener for Civil Society partners. MEC has had more influence than its status as a relative newcomer could be expected to warrant. This may be largely due to the relationships established by the three Founding Partners and its sponsorship by the donors. There are likely to be further opportunities for MEC to capitalise on this privileged position and **it should continue to play this role.**

### 1.2.5 Education in Emergencies (EiE)

(Ref. section 4.2.4 )

The EiE component of the programme is an add-on that does not fit well with the rest of the programme. However, most of the preparatory work for it has been completed and the fund has been operating since June 2014. **It is worth continuing EiE as an aspect of the MEC's grant management role, rather than a stand-alone programme component.**

### 1.2.6 Cross cutting issues

(Ref. section 4.3 )

**The MTR found that the MEC has a mixed record on cross cutting issues.** Disability does not appear to have been a major preoccupation of the Founding Partner projects, but 15% of the grant projects have a specific focus on children with disabilities. MEC has co-founded, and now co-leads, the Disability and Education sub-group of the sector technical body the Education Thematic Working Group. It has actively supported disability advocacy initiatives. The programme can be described as gender-aware rather than actively promoting gender-related interventions. Child safeguarding is taken seriously. Child protection audits and training are mandatory requirements for grant recipients.

However, **MEC has struggled with conflict sensitivity.**<sup>2</sup> This is partly because it is incredibly difficult to operate in the area of ethnic education without treading on sensitive ground. There may also have been occasions when the actions and words of MEC staff caused offence. If, in future, MEC is to focus on hard-to-reach areas in conflict-affected regions, there is an urgent **need for in-depth analysis of ethnic education** networks, capacity gaps and needs and for greater understanding of the sensitivities and risks of partner selection, monitoring, and funding.

As mentioned above, the Founding Partner projects have focused on service delivery and for the most part have depended on development models that are **weak in terms of sustainable change**. The grant-funded projects are small scale, self-contained and geographically isolated. As would be expected only a few months into their operation, they have yet to generate the kind of learning and cross-fertilisation of ideas that could contribute to sustainability. However, the MEC Management Team's attempts to build organisational capacities amongst its partners can be expected to contribute towards sustainability over the course of the programme.

### 1.2.7 Governance and Management

(Ref. section 4.4 )

**Lack of clarity over governance and management arrangements for the MEC has seriously compromised its effectiveness.** This has exacerbated the uncertainty about the nature and purpose of the MEC and has made decision-making unnecessarily convoluted and difficult. The core functions of governance, management and consultation have been confused in a matrix arrangement, in which everyone seems to have an opinion, but no one seems to be responsible. **Structural complications have been fertile ground for personality clashes.** The results have been conflicting interests and a lack of a sense of collective ownership and responsibility, which have contributed to the departure of the MEC Director and poor morale. Given the complications of the governance and management architecture in which the MEC programme has operated, its successes are all the more remarkable. These are due to the commitment and hard work of the MEC Management Team, the Founding Partners and the donors who have managed to muddle through, even though the arrangements were far from ideal.

Proposals made to slim down the programme Steering Committee are a step in the right direction. **Save the Children could make considerable improvements in programme management** by clarifying lines of communications and decision-making, focusing technical

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<sup>2</sup> Disability and gender were considered as the main cross-cutting areas in the programme design. Conflict sensitivity has been added in the course of implementation as it is particularly relevant to grant management.



advice and quality assurance to make the most of the professional expertise available and presenting a more coherent collective position. **DFAT could avoid suggestions of micro-management by concentrating on strategic issues.** DFAT could also **increase value for money** by critically examining the financial provision for staffing, management fees and overheads in the Save the Children Australia contract with a view to renegotiating any future grant agreement.

### 1.2.8 Monitoring and evaluation and reporting

(Ref. section 4.4.5 )

The MEC Management Team, with technical support from Save the Children Australia, has made serious efforts to provide a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework for the programme. However, a fundamental problem the M&E team face is that **the logframe is geared primarily to the Founding Partner service delivery projects. Its indicators are not appropriate to the requirements of a grants programme primarily directed at hard-to-reach populations.** Indeed the quantitative indicators in the current logframe give a strong disincentive for working in hard-to-reach areas, because the numbers will always be low relative to effort and cost.

For future MEC operations, **more sophisticated success criteria are required.** These should recognise the extent to which hard-to-reach populations are being reached. They should measure the contributions the projects are making towards developing systems and pathways that open up opportunities for disadvantaged children and establish equivalence and points of convergence with government provision. Shared learning from one project to another through research and communication should also be an important success criterion.

Programme reporting has improved over time, but it tends to be directed towards the donors for contract compliance purposes. Although much attention has been paid to advocacy, this does not appear to be grounded in relevant and well-documented evidence. **There has been only a limited effort to gather and share learning across the programme.** A more rigorous approach is needed to researching what works and what does not. This should be accompanied by a serious effort to document the lessons, manage the resulting body of knowledge and communicate it in targeted and purposeful ways to increase its influence.

## 1.3 Options for the future

(Ref. section 5 )

The first possible course of action for the future is to maintain the currently committed activity until the end of the programme and evaluate the lessons learned from the experience. **This 'do nothing' option is not the preferred option of the MTR.** Other options will, however, require an extension of the duration and funding of the MEC programme. Reorientation of MEC's focus would require at least one more grants round.

The MTR suggests that **the prime purpose of the MEC should be to support non-government education mechanisms to benefit primary, middle and secondary-aged children for whom the government system is not providing.** This implies a conscious shift away from the current predominance of ECCD. MEC should not be considered as primarily a service delivery programme. It will include elements of service delivery for children outside the area of government provision, but its **value added** will be in fostering linkages, promoting equivalence and investigating points of convergence to expand the range of opportunities for children outside the orbit of government systems. With these objectives in mind, the next round of grants would need to reflect a much more integrated strategy than has been achieved so far through the current competitive selection processes.

**The MTR endorses the emphasis on targeting hard-to-reach populations.** The major target populations for MEC should be:

- Children in complementary basic education systems;
- Children in ethnic education systems;
- Out-of-school children, particularly adolescents;
- Children with disabilities.

Reorientation of the MEC will require, first and foremost, **a clear commitment on the part of the donors**, as it will involve a sizable funding commitment for at least the next four years. **MEC staffing will need to be strengthened** with appropriate levels of technical expertise. This will include a Director with requisite professional leadership and management skills and Technical Assistance with depth expertise in education and political economy. Early tasks will include the development of **technical strategy papers and a new logframe**. Specialist help in developing research agenda and communications and knowledge management will also be needed. The development of **a clear governance structure and a supportive management infrastructure are urgent priorities** and prerequisites for an expansion of MEC duration and funding.

Three main options for the management of the redefined MEC are set out in Section 5. As mentioned, the first option is to leave the programme largely undisturbed for the next two years. The second option is for the donors to tender for a new programme with different management arrangements. This would mean inviting international bids for a managing agent. The third option is to stick with the current management arrangements through Save the Children and extend the programme with a further re-focused round of grants starting in 2015. This option would only be viable if there were changes to the current management model within Save the Children.

**Conclusions are set out in section 6. Recommendations are in Section 7.**

## 2 Introduction

The mid-term review of the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) was commissioned by its funding organisations to examine what has been achieved over the first two years of the programme, to assess the value of the investment and reflect on the relevance of current programme objectives and management arrangements in a rapidly changing environment. The MTR has aimed to identify what is working well and what is not and to provide pointers for future directions, built on a reassessment of needs and the lessons of experience. The review has therefore been both backward and forward-looking.

The Review team consisted of independent international and national consultants, together with education and governance specialists from DFID and DFAT.<sup>3</sup> The Team is very grateful to the Acting Director of MEC and the entire MEC Management Team for their welcome and hospitality and for the expert way in which they managed the preparations for the review. Documentation was provided well in advance and was both useful and relevant in explaining a complex programme. The MEC Management Team managed the logistics of the visits efficiently and their considerable efforts to obtain official clearances for the visits were rewarded just in time for the schedule of visits to take place as planned. The MTR Team would also like to thank all respondents amongst the NGOs, donors and the beneficiary communities who engaged in discussions, generously hosted our visits and expressed their views candidly. Without their considerable assistance, the scope of this Review and the credibility of its findings would have been severely limited.

At first sight this MTR might seem rather early, coming as it did less than two years into the programme and after only a few months of grant management. However, the timing of the MTR was appropriate because:

- The programme is coming to a major change point with the end of the Founding Partner projects in March 2015.
- A new MEC Director was about to be appointed.
- Rationalisation of the governance arrangements for the programme had been proposed in the Steering Committee meeting in November 2014.
- There was an imminent need to decide on an extension of funding and programme duration, if a further round of grants is to be undertaken, reflecting changed priorities.
- There have been a number of problems, both systemic and inter-personal, associated with a range of views about the purpose of MEC and the management and governance arrangements.

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<sup>3</sup> The MTR team consisted of:

- Stephen Baines International Consultant (Team Leader),
- Sandar Myo, National Consultant,
- Colin Bangay, Senior Education Adviser, DFID
- Thomas Parks, Governance and Fragility Adviser, DFAT

## 3 Background

### 3.1 Myanmar Education Consortium

The MEC is a programme supporting non-government organisations to improve education access and quality. It started in late February 2013 with funding from the Australian and UK Governments. The total project budget is approximately AUD 29.6 million<sup>4</sup>, of which DFAT provides about three quarters and DFID provides slightly less than a quarter. The Danish Government has recently joined as a funding partner with an initial contribution of 5m Krone (AUD 0.98m). The programme is currently funded until the end of 2016. Save the Children Australia is the contract manager.

The majority of MEC activity is currently in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). It is also working in complementary education for children outside the government education system in Monastic schools and schools run by ethnically based organisations, and alternative, non-formal education for out-of-school children. The programme has two further components: one concerned with supporting civil society organisations and their voice in policy debates; the other concerned with supporting civil society responses to emergencies affecting education. Crosscutting themes include gender, disability inclusion, child protection, sustainability and conflict sensitivity.

The programme has drawn together three existing 'Founding Partner' projects under a single MEC wrapper, together with a number of local partner civil society organisations (CSOs). The Founding Partner projects are: Save the Children's work in ECCD (AUD 4.6m); World Vision's work in ECCD and non-formal education (AUD 3.5m); and the Burnet Institute's work in monastic schools (AUD 4.5m). Of the three Founding Partner projects, 59% of the budget has been devoted to ECCD, 35% has been spent on monastic faith-based primary education and 6% on community based NFE. These Founding Partner projects are due to finish in March 2015, roughly half way through the current MEC programme.<sup>5</sup>

Since mid 2014, thirteen CSO-implemented projects have been funded to provide education services through MEC grants. These grants were awarded through a two-part expression of interest/request for proposal process (EoI/RFP), which initially attracted 159 applications. They vary in size, up to a maximum of US\$250,000 *per annum*. The presumption is that they will cover activities over three years, although current grant agreements are for an initial period of 12 months. Over 42% of the value of the grants has been for ECCD. The number of grant-recipients and the geographical spread of grant-funded projects are expected to expand, but in order for this to happen, the duration of the MEC programme will need to be extended.

MEC is implemented through a Management Team employed by Save the Children International in Myanmar. The MEC operates under Save the Children's MOU with the Government of Myanmar. It uses Save the Children's premises and its financial, HR and ICT systems. However, it has brand identity as a separate part of the Save the Children country programme, maintaining its own website, reports and financial accounts. The Management Team comprises 20 members of staff, plus 5 full-time equivalent support staff seconded from Save the Children International. It is based in Yangon and organised in three sections, Finance and Grant Management, Capacity Building and Monitoring, Research and Learning. At the time of the Review, the post of MEC Director had been vacant for over four months

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<sup>4</sup> The budget is denominated in a number of different currencies and subject to exchange rate variations.

<sup>5</sup> Burnett Institute has requested a no-cost extension to June 2015.

and filled in an acting capacity by one of the senior MEC Management Team personnel.<sup>6</sup> A member of DFAT Myanmar staff has been seconded on a part-time basis to the MEC Management Team.

Line management of the MEC Director post lies with the Save the Children International Country Director in Myanmar. Technical support, quality assurance and contract management is provided by Save the Children Australia as the contract holder. Save the Children UK maintains a watching brief. The original intention was that the Founding Partners should provide technical support to MEC. Time is allocated in the staffing budget for these inputs. The Founding Partners have also sat on the Steering Committee together with Save the Children and the two principle donors, DFAT and DFID. This has meant that the same individuals amongst the Founding Partners have had three roles; as implementers of their discrete projects; as advisers to MEC Management; and as governors on the Steering Committee.

The foundation documents for MEC include a project design document, a theory of change and a logframe. An underlying premise of these documents was that there would be an approximate alignment of what MEC was trying to achieve in the non-government sector with the aims of the Quality Basic Education Programme (QBEP) operating with government through UNICEF. This explains the focus on ECCD, Complementary Education and Non-formal Education, which together comprised the 'permitted zone' for external involvement during the years of Myanmar's international isolation. The project document assumed that there would be linkages with QBEP, which would have favourable synergies. There was also an assumption that MEC would assist, through advocacy and capacity building, in civil society development and that this was indeed one of principal goals of the programme.

The project document was the product of intense discussions amongst the Founding Partners and donors. It is apparent that the idea of a 'rolling design' was seen as a way of getting started, even though not all the elements of the design were fully agreed. There was also insufficient funding in the budget to cover all the activities proposed to meet logframe targets.

Some significant changes from the original concept have been made in the course of implementation. The most notable of these changes was the decision in late 2013 to bring forward the first round of grants to local civil society organisations. It had been originally intended that this should happen at the end of year two i.e. March 2015, once a situation analysis of the non-government education sector had taken place.

### 3.2 The changing context

The political context in which the MEC programme is now operating is very different from the time when the programme was initially conceived. The Government of Myanmar is now leading a reform process, which includes greater decentralisation, or at least de-concentration. One consequence of the reforms is greater recognition of the role of non-state actors in the education sector. The government has attempted to reach out to Civil Society by including NGO representatives in the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR). The Association Law has removed some of the restrictions under which CSOs operated in the past.

Another consequence is much greater openness to outside assistance. The range of activities that donor programmes can now support is much wider than it was when MEC was

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<sup>6</sup> The MEC Director of Finance and Grant Management had been Acting Director during this period.

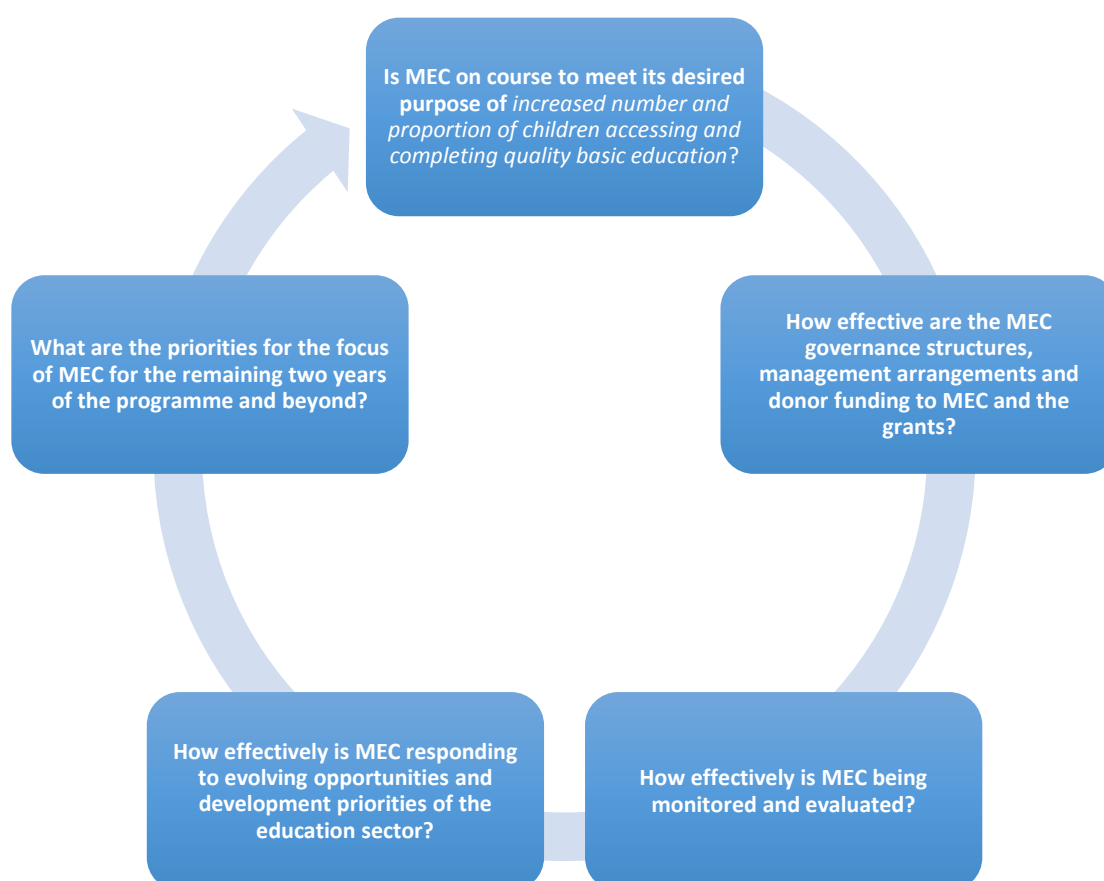
first conceived. Furthermore, ceasefire agreements between Government and most of the major ethnic armed opposition groups have created new opportunities for assistance to conflict-affected areas, including hundreds of thousands of children in areas outside government control. There is tacit government acknowledgement of ethnic education organisations, although acceptance and recognition are still distant prospects.

However, with change comes uncertainty. There is now an active Opposition in parliament, and the prospect of elections in 2015 serves to make education reform highly politically charged. The reforms and their implications are not widely understood. While those in the higher levels of the civil service at the centre are actively engaged in the reform process, those at lower levels and those at the periphery do not yet share their sense of involvement. There is much to be done in communicating the reforms and building confidence and capacity for decentralised decision making amongst lower level officials. Mutual mistrust between government and NGOs fostered over years of authoritarian rule will take some time to dissipate.

### **3.3 MTR Terms of Reference**

The purpose of the MTR has been to advise the MEC donors and the implementing agencies on whether the programme's scope, governance, management arrangements and implementation constitute an appropriate and effective response to the education needs of Myanmar's non-government education sector and the wider education priorities of the country. The Review Team was charged with responsibility to recommend changes to MEC and donor support, so that the programme addresses Myanmar's education needs more effectively in the future.

The MTR Terms of Reference are set out in Annex 1. The diagram below shows the key questions in the MTR Terms of Reference. These questions are addressed in Section 4, Findings.



### 3.4 Methodology

Review methods consisted of a combination of desk study, visits, meetings and interviews with stakeholders. Face-to-face discussions were held with MEC staff, Save the Children International in Myanmar, staff of the principal donor organisations, leading figures in the Founding Partners, local grant-recipient partners and Government of Myanmar officials. Discussions by telephone were held with representatives of Save the Children Australia and Save the Children UK. Prior to the work in Myanmar, the Team spent time reviewing documents. The Review in Myanmar took place in and around Yangon, Hpa An, Mandalay, Myitkina and Nay Pyi Taw. A visit was also made to Mae Sot, over the Thai border. The schedule for the Review is in Annex 2.

MEC Management Team provided logistical support and technical advice to the review team. MEC and donor representatives joined the team for meetings during the fieldwork phase of the review. The review commenced with preliminary planning in October 2014, concluding with the submission of a final report in early 2015. The main fieldwork and discussions in Myanmar took place 16-29 November 2014.

The Review was largely based on a qualitative assessment, based on the evidence gained through document review, interviews and discussions and on the collective experience of the team members. The available quantitative data relates mainly to the Founding Partner projects: the grants to local partners, having been provided relatively recently, have yet to generate much quantitative information. As the Founding Partner projects are principally aimed at service delivery, much of the reporting has been on inputs and activities e.g. the

numbers of ECCD centres established, WASH facilities provided and teachers trained. Evidence of the effects of these activities is harder to find. The MTR did not attempt a thorough evaluation of these projects.<sup>7</sup>

Qualitative methods were appropriate because of the strategic nature of the MTR. One of the many expectations of the MTR, and one of the review team's major tasks, was to address the basic questions of what MEC is and what it should be aiming to achieve. These are questions about which there is no shortage of deeply held opinions. Moreover they are questions about the future as much as the past. A forward-looking assessment is necessarily based on perceptions and projections rather than hard facts. The review team made every attempt to reconcile the conflicting opinions of those most intimately involved and to maintain a balanced view, but ultimately, the MTR conclusions and recommendations are based on the judgement and experience of the team members. It is hoped that some confidence in objectivity and balance might be derived from the composition of the Review team, which combined independent international and national consultants, and education and governance specialists from DFAT and DFID. Despite this donor participation in the team, the Team Leader has tried to ensure that this report takes an independent line.

The purpose and direction of MEC has divided opinion and generated considerable debate. Many of the principal players have been involved in the programme since the design phase and have a high degree of emotional investment in it. The aim of the MTR has been to offer outside perspectives and thereby contribute towards reflection and learning within the MEC programme. The conclusions and recommendations of the MTR will not meet everyone's expectations. However, it is hoped that all those most involved, as implementers, beneficiaries and funders feel that the review has been conducted in a participatory manner. It is also hoped that it is generally accepted that the review team has listened and has reflected back what was heard and that it has formed judgements on the basis of available evidence and relevant experience.

The impressionistic nature of the Review was emphasised during briefing and debriefing meetings in Myanmar. Separate debriefing sessions were conducted with MEC Management Team and the principal funding organisations, prior to a full wrap up meeting with MEC, the donors, Save the Children, World Vision and Burnet Institute. After the Mission, the team leader had further discussions by telephone with Save the Children Australia and Save the Children UK.

As will be apparent from the presentation in **Annex 3**, which was submitted as the Aide Memoire for the MTR, the findings were presented in terms of *Achievements*, *Concerns* and *Where should we go from here*. It is hoped that from these sessions and from this report, consensus can be formed on the way forward.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 MEC: a problem of definition

The MEC started as five separate programme elements: the three existing Founding Partner projects; support for civil society voice in policy discussions; and an education in emergencies facility. A sixth element was anticipated in the original design: a grants

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<sup>7</sup> An evaluation of the Save the Children ECCD project, which ran for six years with DFID funding before it was incorporated in MEC, is being planned



programme aimed at supporting non-state education in difficult-to-reach areas. This was introduced in MEC's first year, earlier than originally envisaged.

These elements are not collectively coherent and do not share a clear overall vision. The programme's foundation documents do not adequately address this problem. The project design document is neither clear nor succinct and falls back on the concept of a 'rolling design' in the hope that clarity of purpose will evolve over time. Whereas the *raison d'être* of a programme normally determines the constituent parts, in MEC's case it seems the other way around. The Theory of Change and Logframe appear to be retro-fitted around the pre-existing Founding Partner projects, with other components and cross cutting themes added on. The result is a conglomeration of components rather than a distinct integrated programme.

A fundamental problem is that, although there are plenty of views on the subject, there is no consensus about what MEC is, and therefore what it is attempting to achieve. Amongst other things, the MEC has been described as: a Civil Society development programme; a channel for advocacy and voice; an alternative education service delivery programme; a consensus based coalition; a multi-donor funding mechanism; and a programme for education for hard-to-reach populations. Not all of these descriptors are mutually exclusive. It is possible for MEC to be more than one thing at the same time, but it cannot be all of these things simultaneously. In the absence of a clear purpose, MEC's first two years have been affected by conflicting views and controversy. A rolling design needs the anchor of clear objectives.

The imminent end of the Founding Partner projects brings into stark relief the necessity to redefine the MEC. By the end of March 2015, what will be left will be a relatively small number of grant-funded service delivery projects, heavily biased towards ECCD, reaching a small number of beneficiaries. This does not look like a viable model. Nor does it look like value for money. Staffing costs and management fees will amount to a very high proportion of operational expenditure.

The 'natural break' occasioned by the end of the Founding Partner projects is an opportunity to re-establish the purpose of the MEC, to give it sharper focus and a clearer narrative. It is not helpful to think of MEC as primarily a 'Civil Society development' programme. Civil Society is a broad concept encapsulating diverse and differentiated elements. The MEC interacts with only a small section of Civil Society concerned with education provision. It can therefore claim to have an impact on a much narrower group of individuals and organisations than the phrase '*Civil Society development*' implies.

Conversely, the claim that MEC is an education service delivery programme does not stand up to scrutiny. The portion of education provision that is funded by grants is not big enough to have a credible impact. The numbers of beneficiaries are unlikely to be huge, even if there were a substantial expansion of the grants. The nature of the likely interventions and the absorptive capacity of the local CSO partners are limiting factors.

If MEC lacks credibility in relation to service delivery, it is also missing the opportunity to compensate for this by focusing on innovation. It is not showcasing examples of good practice and learning across projects, in order to be catalytic in changing systems and expanding opportunities. Moreover, it is staffed in order to manage grants. It does not have the specialist technical capacity to identify, analyse and publicise innovative approaches.

MEC has aspirations to support education for hard-to-reach populations. This seems the most compelling rationale for the MEC and is closely aligned with the original overall programme objective. However, as currently configured, only a small proportion of MEC programming is in hard-to-reach areas and with hard-to-reach populations. There is

currently no coherent vision or strategy for working in these areas. Moreover, as will be explained in section 4.2.2 below, some of the grant management systems developed by MEC Management Team may actually inhibit, rather than help, the MEC's ability to work with hard-to-reach populations.

## **4.2 Progress towards outputs and outcomes**

The difficulty in defining the MEC makes assessing progress quite challenging. There is also a practical difficulty in gaining anything more than an impression of progress in the short time available for the MTR. In this section observations are made on progress across the main programme and against the crosscutting themes. Although comments are made on grant management processes, little can be said of the impact of the grants, because it is still only seven months since the first round of grants was disbursed.

### **4.2.1 Founding Partner projects**

In the project sites visited during the review, the MTR team witnessed some substantial and tangible results from the Founding Partner projects. Community-based ECCD centres are providing stimulating play-based early years education, with trained and committed caregivers and engaged parents. Monastic schools have benefited from teacher and manager training and the provision of water and sanitation facilities. Much needed non-formal literacy, numeracy and life skills education is being provided to out-of school children through community organisations.

While no firm conclusions can be based on such limited exposure, members of the MTR team were impressed by what they saw and by the hard work and commitment of the project staff. The MTR did not attempt to evaluate the projects, but MEC monitoring reports suggest that the three Founding Partner projects are more or less on track to meet their approved logframe targets in terms of numbers of beneficiaries and services provided.<sup>8</sup>

Measured against criteria of service delivery, the Founding Partner projects appear to have done what was expected of them. In the circumstances in which they were conceived and in which they have operated for much of their duration, this is a noteworthy achievement. Having said this, the targets set were not ambitious relative to need. These were three relatively small projects with narrow impact and because the emphasis has been on service delivery, the amount of learning emanating from the projects has been limited.

In all three cases, replicability may prove a challenge. The ECCD centre approach promoted by Save the Children is an expensive model and although a low-cost alternative parenting model has been trialled, it is not clear how well this will catch on, without continued funding support. Moreover, the juxtaposition of a bright and well-equipped ECCD centre alongside a dark and dingy primary school suggests that the influence of child-friendly messages has not yet bridged the gap between pre-school and the formal system.<sup>9</sup> There must be some doubt about the sustainability of the development model. Save the Children's approach appears to rely on community empowerment to maintain and carry forward the benefits provided. It is

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<sup>8</sup> According to the September 2014 monitoring report of progress against the logframe, there may be a shortfall against target in the number of children newly accessing ECD services.

<sup>9</sup> The ECCD centre in Pawt Htaw village, Hpa An Township was in stark contrast to the neighboring primary school. In this regard it is noted that Save the Children is planning to use Norwegian and Finnish funding to develop a follow-on project at kindergarten level, aimed at facilitating the transition between pre-school and formal schooling.

feasible that this will sustain the existing centres, but other communities wishing to create their own centres will face the challenge of considerable initial investment costs.

The MTR team was impressed by the World Vision supported community based NFE centre visited in Mandalay, but struck by the relatively small number of beneficiaries. The approach is only reaching a few hundred out-of-school children. The World Vision model involves the creation of its own community-based organisations (CBOs), which offer the opportunity for continued fund-raising and sustainability. However, in terms of service delivery return on investment, this too is an expensive model and one that cannot easily be taken to scale.

The MTR team visit to a monastic school in Tharsi Township raised questions about the relatively heavy emphasis on infrastructure provision at a school, which appeared generously endowed by other donations.<sup>10</sup> Access to funding amongst monastic schools no doubt varies and no inferences can be drawn from a single visit, but the evaluation that the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) and Burnet Institute are planning should consider the mix of inputs provided to monastic schools. What was interesting about the Burnet Institute approach, however, was that central to its development model was the organisational development of a local NGO, MEDG, to continue support for monastic education.

## 4.2.2 Grant management

The MTR team was impressed by the achievement of the MEC Management Team in introducing a grants mechanism in a short period of time. The process of inviting expressions of interest, sifting and proceeding to a guided bidding process with short-listed candidates appears to have been well managed. However, the process was not without its detractors and seems to have stirred up an amount of negative sentiment towards the MEC. The grant management process has been a learning process for all concerned and lessons need to be drawn from the experience.

### 4.2.2.1 Selection of grant recipients

Perhaps inevitably a competitive selection procedure tends to favour those organisations accustomed to this form of fund-raising. A large number of applicants did not progress past the expression of interest stage. The CSOs, which successfully came through the process included INGOs, local organisations with knowledge of donor language and requirements and those with access to consultants who could provide this expertise. Other applicants were unfamiliar with the procedures and with the gender, child protection and fiduciary compliance aspects of the grants application process.

MEC appears to have under-estimated the capacity constraints of some of the key prospective local partners. The application process disadvantaged local organisations working with hard-to-reach populations, who had not been able to access donor funding before, and had had limited exposure to donor concepts on education and grants stewardship. This was also problematic because MEC had raised expectations in advance of the call for Expressions of Interest. These outreach efforts were successful in drawing out prospective applicants, but produced more than 100 disappointed organisations.

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<sup>10</sup> The school had toilet facilities provided by both JICA and Burnet, in addition to its existing facilities. It also had a water supply provided by Burnett and a filtration system provided by a local benefactor. Considerable building work was being undertaken apparently funded by local donations.

Some of the MTR's informants claimed that MEC's choice of partners had created divisions between groups working in the same area, by selecting partners with limited track record and not selecting the most established and influential ethnic education actors. The MTR has no way of verifying this perception, but the fact that the perception exists is itself a lesson.

The focus of grant proposals has tended to reflect CSO programming interests rather than the most critical needs. The partners with whom MEC is working, as a result of the competitive process, are not necessarily the ones best suited to meet the programme objectives. One of the reasons for the predominance of ECCD in the current grants profile is that development organisations such as UNICEF and INGOs, such as Save the Children and World Vision, have worked in this area for some years and have created interest amongst local groups. The supply of organisations has thus created its own demand.

If MEC is to focus on hard-to-reach areas, more purposive targeting will be necessary. In any future grants round, MEC should consider modifying its approach to competitive bidding accordingly. This will involve the selection of geographic areas, in-depth understanding of sensitive issues, knowledge of the organisations with established access to these areas, based on trusted relations with local communities and an appreciation of the risks of doing harm to existing networks.

#### **4.2.2.2 Compliance issues**

The mechanics of grant management and support to grant recipients have been a major preoccupation of the MEC Management Team over the last year. Organisational capacity assessments, M&E and compliance issues have been the initial areas of focus in this first year, with training being carried out in reporting, baselines and child safeguarding. MEC has conducted participatory organisation assessments with a view to tailoring capacity building to needs and also plans to extend generic organisational development training to other non-recipient organisations. Several grant recipients commented that MEC capacity building was too Yangon-based and that it could be made more useful and relevant if it were conducted in situ, or at least closer to home. Those dealing with ethnic education commented that some of the key players could not easily travel outside their areas of control.

MEC's demands for data have been perceived as onerous. Some CSOs have felt overwhelmed by the data reporting requirements of the M&E team. It would have been helpful if MEC had set out the reporting obligations more clearly at the expressions of interest stage, so everyone would at least have known what they were taking on. Organisations working in ethnic education were particularly critical of the MEC Management Team's data requirements as they regard information on student and teacher numbers as highly sensitive and feel the approach of some MEC staff has been too rigid. They were particularly concerned about the requirement for ethnic disaggregation of the major data elements for the baseline, although disability was also quoted as a sensitive subject. There were also concerns that data collection for the baseline forced them to visit some insecure areas and that these dangers were not appreciated by MEC Management Team.<sup>11</sup>

It is fair to point out that the MEC Management Team feels that this criticism should not be accepted at face value and that it is very concerned about issues of security. It would seem that, in the past, donations made to ethnic education organisations by other donors have

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<sup>11</sup> Data requirements were particular issues of contention with KIO-ED and Shalom. Discussions with KTWG revealed considerable resentment at perceived MEC high-handedness.

come with fewer conditions, and limited data requirements.<sup>12</sup> The MTR team acknowledges that some of this feedback may stem from CSOs' reluctance to provide higher levels of proof in reporting. However, complaints that monitoring was unnecessarily excessive, in terms of burden and security risk do need to be taken seriously by MEC and donors and addressed for the future.

It is understandable that the M&E team have felt constrained by the need to collect data relevant to the logframe. They have struggled to reconcile M&E for grant-funded projects with logframe indicators and targets, which are more relevant to Founding Partner projects. Demands for data have been perceived as 'donor behaviours' and have tended to exacerbate tensions, where they existed, between MEC and its local partners.

Part of the disappointment expressed about MEC's approach can be attributed to confusion about the nature of the MEC and what it is trying to achieve. This confusion has been compounded by a loose use of language to describe the role of MEC and its relationship with grant recipients. The project design document is infused with the language of cosy partnership. The reality is that there is a transactional relationship between grant-giver and grant-receiver and that grants come with conditions. The manner in which those conditions are applied requires sensitive handling and expectations need to be managed. It is clear that MEC will win few friends if it promises more than it delivers. Equally it is likely to attract criticism if it is perceived as too heavy-handed and over-concerned with the mechanics of grant management.

There are lessons here for the donors, who are the source of the fiduciary and policy conditions upon which MEC insists. There is a natural tension between, on the one hand, partnerships that are intended to nurture local organisations playing an important role in delivering to the hard-to-reach, and on the other, efficient and cost effective grants stewardship that minimises risk and maximises numbers of beneficiaries. It is incumbent on the donors to balance their requirements for accountability with the real danger of alienating the very groups they are aiming to support.

#### **4.2.3 MEC support to Civil Society engagement in policy discussions**

MEC is playing an important role in supporting Civil Society engagement in policy discussions. It is making significant contributions to the CESR and National Education Sector Plan (NESP). The MEC Management Team has been asked to draft a chapter on non-government education for the NESP. This is a great opportunity to raise the status of non-government providers. Given that MEC is a relative newcomer and is not itself an NGO, it is punching far above its weight in the policy debate. It needs to continue to engage opportunistically.

However, it should keep its feet on the ground. It owes its position at the policy table largely to the established relationships of the Founding Partners and the sponsorship of the donors, rather than any groundswell of Civil Society opinion or an expression of 'voice'. Despite maintaining an advocacy role, MEC lacks the legitimacy to claim a leadership role on the primary issues it is working to address. This is in part because of limited track record, but also because it cannot speak for all civil society groups<sup>13</sup>. Its proper role is concerned with playing a constructive role in supporting dialogue on particular issues, broadening the circle

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<sup>12</sup> For most ethnic education funding in the past, donors provided resources from humanitarian or peace support funds (as opposed to education funds), and most of the assistance was customised for conflict areas and humanitarian crises.

<sup>13</sup> Some ethnic education groups would contest any claim that the MEC represents their interests.

of local actors engaged, and helping groups to articulate common positions vis-à-vis government. MEC needs to capitalise on its current privileged position by leveraging its relationship with the donors to manoeuvre its partners into centre stage.

There has been much debate over the last two years about MEC becoming a legal entity in its own right with its own board of trustees, staffing and systems. In the past this would have been difficult, but there has been some relaxation of the Government of Myanmar's registration rules. As a long-term goal an autonomous local body, externally funded but locally governed, remains a valid aspiration. It is however, a distant prospect and currently, something of a distraction. At this stage MEC is a relatively small player in a disparate non-government sector. It has not yet established a successful track record beyond the INGO projects and is insufficiently well accepted as a major channel for Civil Society voice and non-government contributions to education. It needs more 'runs on the board' before the autonomous agency debate is raised again.

#### **4.2.4 Education in emergencies**

The education in emergencies component of the MEC provides small-scale rapid assistance to communities affected by localised disasters that have disrupted education provision in that community. The assistance is in the form of one-off grants and teachers' and students' kits. The fund was launched in June 2014 and is publicised on the MEC website.

In the MEC programme structure, this component seems like an add-on, which does not really fit with the rest of the programme. It is quite labour-intensive, as it has an EiE manager in the MEC Management Team who has conducted an EiE capacity assessment of all funded partners and provided EiE cluster capacity mapping training to the Myanmar Non-Government Organization – Child Protection Rights (MNGO-CPR) group.

It is not clear to the MTR whether MEC is an appropriate vehicle for EiE or whether the transaction costs are justified. However, since the fund is in place and much of the preparation work has now been done, there seems little point in changing it now. When, however, the programme structure is revised and a new logframe is produced, EiE could be subsumed as a separate category of grant, rather than a component in its own right.

### **4.3 Progress in relation to cross cutting themes and issues**

#### **4.3.1 Disability**

School participation by children with disabilities in Myanmar is very low. Half the disabled population has never attended school, and only 35% of those that have attended have progressed past the primary level.<sup>14</sup>

The MTR found little evidence that disability was a major preoccupation of the Founding Partner projects.<sup>15</sup> MEC has provided grants to Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) and Karuna Myanmar Social Service (KMSS) Patheingyi to pilot disability focused strategies through an inclusive education approach. This involves training teachers, parents, and communities on inclusive practices and advocating for improvement of school physical infrastructure medical screening. MEC has supported CSO-led disability advocacy initiatives.

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<sup>14</sup> First Myanmar National Disability Survey, MSWRR.

<sup>15</sup> At the Monastic school visited in Tharsi Township, Burnett Institute had provided a large disabled toilet. It had support rails around the walls but the toilet was in the middle of the room with no support around it. It would seem that this design was of limited use to children with physical disabilities.



It co-founded and now co-leads the Disability and Education sub-group of the sector technical body the Education Sector Working Group..

MEC's commitment to work in disability is laudable. MILI however commented to the MTR that all MEC programmes should be disability aware and build in steps to be disability friendly. This raises questions about interactions and learning across projects, to which this report returns in section 5.

The MTR has identified disability as an activity area in which MEC should give greater emphasis (section 6)

#### **4.3.2 Gender**

The MEC could best be described as gender-conscious rather than actively pursuing gender as a focal priority. Component projects are required to report on the impact of their activities on girls and boys, women and men and gender mainstreaming is integrated into capacity development plans. Disaggregated data is collected. The ECCD component promotes the participation of both male and female parents and guardians. The Monastic schools project is encouraging separation of toilets for boys and girls. Female teachers predominate in most basic education schools and their equivalents. Females are therefore benefiting proportionally from the training the programme is providing. Yet most of those in management positions in schools and the majority of Management Committee members for ECCD and NFE are male, reflecting cultural and social norms. The MTR did not find evidence that MEC is engaging in activities that seriously challenge these norms.

#### **4.3.3 Child protection**

Child safeguarding is a priority for the MEC, reflecting the strong focus on child protection of Save the Children and the other Founding Partners and the clear policy steer of the donors. The Founding Partners, as accredited NGOs, have systems and processes, which are compliant with the DFAT child protection policy. It was reassuring to discover that visitors to World Vision project sites, including MTR team members, have to sign an undertaking on child protection.

Applicants for MEC grants were required to identify child protection issues in their organisations and in their proposed projects. Save the Children International provided TA to conduct a review of all proposals, specifically to highlight child protection issues. Where high-risk activities were identified, as in the case of one applicant proposing residential care without proven experience, applicants were asked to remove such activities or provide assurance on how risks would be managed. MEC has conducted capacity building activities around child protection to emphasise its importance as more than a tick-box compliance issue.

#### **4.3.4 Conflict sensitivity**

MEC has great potential to play a leadership role in conflict sensitive assistance, particularly in the area of ethnic education. MEC deserves a great deal of credit for establishing partnerships with some highly influential organisations in ethnic education. Grants to these organisations can be difficult to manage due to political sensitivities in ethnically distinct geographic areas, and challenges with reporting and monitoring. MEC has faced difficulties as a newcomer to the field of ethnic education, and has received some strong criticism of its funding decisions and requirements from some of the more established players. In at least two cases, MEC has worked through most of the initial challenges, and has established a workable partnership that minimises the risks and burden on the grant recipient, while ensuring an appropriate level of oversight and accountability.

While there have been some successes and progress, MEC has some way to go on conflict sensitivity, particularly if ethnic education is to be a major focus area in the future. Conflict sensitivity requires understanding of the challenges and sensitivities of organisations working in contested areas or on politically sensitive issues. MEC has a mixed track record in this regard. Incidents of perceived insensitive behaviour in engagement with ethnic education actors were reported to the MTR team. It is difficult to verify claims from informants and the MTR team acknowledges that those working in ethnic education can be extremely hard to please. However some feedback was reflected by more than one source.

MEC's outreach to organisations working in conflict-affected areas has been well intentioned, but has created problems with unmet expectations. Whether these organisations' expectations were justified or reasonable is difficult to tell. It seems that MEC management made significant efforts to explore opportunities for funding and to encourage applications from ethnic education organisations. Only a small number could be accepted and by disappointing most of these organisations, MEC has created an adverse reaction. It now has some ground to make up in re-establishing its standing with ethnic education organisations.

If MEC is to focus on hard-to-reach areas in conflict-affected regions, primarily through ethnic education, there is a clear need for much more in-depth analysis of current ethnic education networks, capacity gaps and needs. There is also a need for greater understanding of the sensitivities and risks of partner selection, monitoring, and funding. This level of analysis was not carried out prior to the first round of grants and it is now a priority.

#### **4.3.5 Sustainability**

Comments on the sustainability of the Founding Partner projects and the development models they have adopted have already been made in section 4.2.1. While they have made strenuous efforts to develop community-based organisations to continue support for their activities, their primary focus on service delivery has limited the sustainable impact of the projects when external funding ends. However, the projects are not without legacy. The Government of Myanmar's adoption of school-based ECCD as a priority in its 'Quick Win' agenda has been influenced by the experience of Save the Children and World Vision in ECCD. The work that Save the Children plans aimed at easing the transition from pre-school to kindergarten will build on the organisation's long experience in ECCD. Burnett Institutes' sponsorship of MEDG means that a local CSO will continue the work of supporting monastic schools.

It is too soon to comment on the sustainability of the 13 grant-funded projects. However, they are small scale, fairly self-contained and geographically isolated projects, which have yet to generate much in the way of learning or cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches. Support to the organisational capacity of the CSOs involved can be expected to have some lasting effects, but their reliance on continued external funding means that their ability to maintain programmatic and organisational momentum in the future may be a challenge.

### **4.4 Governance and programme management**

#### **4.4.1 A suitable case for treatment**

Poor governance and management arrangements for the MEC have been a serious constraint. Combined with uncertainty about the nature and purpose of the MEC, they have inhibited the programme's effectiveness.



It may have seemed a good idea at the time to have all the principal stakeholders represented on the governing steering committee, but the arrangement set out in the programme document and implemented until very recently confused the concepts of governance, management and consultation. This might have worked if everyone agreed to everything, but in reality, it just encouraged everyone to feel they had an equal right to give an opinion and feel equally disgruntled. Crucially it discouraged a sense of collective responsibility.

Key people in the Save the Children, World Vision and Burnet Institute were involved as implementers of the programme (65% of their time), paid advisors to it (35% of their time) and members of the steering committee. Save the Children has had the added role of being the contract holder, a situation complicated by its internal organisational architecture. Save the Children Australia, as the body accountable to DFAT Canberra, holds the budget and provides quality assurance, oversight and technical advice from Melbourne. Further advice and opinion comes from Bangkok (from Save the Children UK). MEC staff members, including the Director, are employed by Save the Children International in Myanmar, which also provides accommodation and logistical, financial and HR systems support for the MEC. Operational management lies with the MEC Director, but the Director has had little control over the Founding Partner advisers. Significant line management decisions lie with the Country Director of Save the Children International in Myanmar.

DFAT has further complicated the situation. It manages the contract with Save the Children Australia, through its Canberra headquarters. It is the main funding agency and a prominent member of the steering committee. It has also seconded a member of staff to MEC as an ex-officio member of the management team with a direct line to DFAT Yangon and Canberra. The position was designed to support DFAT risk management and strategic oversight and to operationalise a collaborative partnership between donors and implementers. The individual concerned has made a valued contribution, but there is a structural contradiction in the post. Despite the individual's considerable efforts to avoid a conflict of interest, the creation of the seconded post has created a perception amongst the implementers that DFAT is engaging in micro-management.

An organogram of programme management and governance cannot be drawn in less than three dimensions. It would be difficult to conjure up a more complex structure; an arrangement made worse when personality clashes were added to the mix. The former Director appears to have fallen out with a number of the key players when he tried to address the structural constraints of his position. While the MTR cannot comment on the balance of responsibility, this situation adversely affected morale within MEC and tested the goodwill of those on the outside.

The question '*who is in charge of MEC?*' elicited different answers depending on who was asked. There is little sense of collective responsibility amongst members of the steering committee. The decision to bring forward the first grants round has been openly criticised by some of those who were party to the decision. The MTR team did not get a sense that the MEC retains the enthusiastic support of those in the Founding Partners who created it.

The situation has had some serious, not to say bizarre, features. The continued presence of the former Director in the MEC office five months after he ceased to carry out his duties is a case in point. A curious game of 'pass the parcel' of responsibility has been played, with Save the Children Australia claiming to be powerless to influence this situation because of its peculiar organisational architecture with 'members' responsible for contract management and Save the Children International managing the programme in Myanmar. Sound programme management requires clear lines of authority and responsibility and it is up to the parties concerned to sort themselves out to achieve this. The fact that Save the Children

has a particular organisational structure is a matter entirely for Save the Children to determine. To the outside world the nice distinctions between the various component parts of the entity are of little consequence. They cannot be used as an excuse for a lack of clarity in decision-making or an absence of collective responsibility.

While a diversity of views and critical self-examination are crucial in any organisation, some of the criticism of MEC expressed to the MTR by senior Save the Children respondents was surprisingly trenchant. One would certainly not expect everyone to be “on message” and to spout a consistent corporate view but one would expect a common sense of ownership and collective responsibility. It would be reassuring if all the relevant parts of Save the Children were to come together as a collective entity to confirm that MEC is an important and integral part of the Myanmar country programme and not just a ‘cuckoo in the nest’, which has to be looked after, but not really loved.

#### **4.4.2 Succeeding against the odds**

Given the difficulties of programme governance and management, the achievements of the MEC are noteworthy. The Founding Partner projects have continued to operate largely independently of MEC management. Grants management processes have been established with clear guidance on issues such as financial management and child safeguarding. This provides a solid basis of procedure and experience on which to build.

The fact that MEC is succeeding in these ways is testament to the commitment and hard work of the MEC Management Team, the Founding Partners and indeed everyone involved, who have shown a willingness to muddle through, even though the arrangements were far from ideal.

The differing cultures, policy drivers, engagement and implementation styles and risk thresholds between donors and INGO implementers were inevitably going to play out in the implementation of MEC amidst a ‘rolling design’ and a challenging and restricted operating environment. However it is important to note that over the last few months the Steering Committee has been productive and collegial. Stronger working relationships between the donors, Save the Children and MEC have developed at the Steering Committee level. This provides grounds for optimism that improvements can be made. Indeed changes proposed for reconstituting the Steering Committee in early November 2014 are clearly steps in the right direction. These reduce the executive members to DFAT, DFID and Save the Children and draw much-needed distinctions between decision-making and consultative functions

Save the Children could make improvements in programme management through relatively minor adjustments to existing management arrangements. This would include clarifying communications and decision-making between Melbourne and Yangon and ensuring that technical advice and quality assurance is available as and when required by the programme Director. It would also include resolving internal structural issues and generally presenting a more coherent collective position. All this is entirely fixable, but it will require a shift in attitude towards greater teamwork and accountability.

#### **4.4.3 Value for money**

The MTR carried out a limited review of MEC overhead financing. This suggested there might be efficiencies that could be made at the point of contract renewal that would offer improved value for Australian and UK tax payers’ money deployed through DFAT and DFID.

The donor partners currently fund all MEC staff as well as proportions of Save the Children, World Vision and Burnet staff. This shared staff arrangement does not appear to have worked well as technical advice has not always been available to MEC management team when needed. This arrangement should not be continued when the current arrangement

ends with the closure of Founding Partner projects in March 2015. For the future, to strengthen identity, accountability and reporting lines, it is strongly advised that all MEC staff should be 100% assigned to MEC and answerable to the MEC Director.

It is not immediately clear what MEC's overhead and management costs cover, nor the extent to which they are financing MEC or broader Founding Partner programmes. It appears that the donor partners are already covering all office and staff costs. In addition Save the Children is charging Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) of AUD \$2.7 million, which represents 10% on total direct costs on DFAT and DFID funding. This includes the budget for the grants, so that if the grants were increased by AUD\$1 million, the ICR would increase by AUD\$100,000 without a proportionate increase in effort. Typically, the overhead charge might be expected to go down proportionally as the investment amount increases. In addition to this levy, Save the Children Australia levies an additional 1% management charge on total direct costs for Burnet and World Vision grants.

Given many operational costs are already covered, the overheads and management fees seem on the high side. This might be tested through a comparison with other fund management arrangements. It is worth noting that the Danish funders of MEC have negotiated an overhead of 7% for a smaller investment. At very least, a simplification and rationalisation of staffing and overhead charges is necessary, in order to clarify reporting lines, manage potential conflicts of interest and provide a more transparent means of presenting value for money.

#### **4.4.4 The role of donors**

The Development Partners need to take a share of the responsibility for the muddled governance and management arrangements. DFAT, with DFID's acquiescence, approved the programme design with all its peculiarities and allowed the programme to start before the basics, including a clear purpose, assured budget and sensible governance structure were in place. DFAT has also presided over a contract agreement with Save the Children, which may not be as advantageous as it might be on value for money grounds.

The concept of a 'rolling design', which envisaged an evolving process, provided scope for adapting on the basis of new information and changes in the context. Such a flexible design was justifiable in the rapidly changing Myanmar context but the mechanism for focusing and adjusting the design was hampered because there were so many parties involved.

The decisions of donors to adopt a rolling design, co-locate a DFAT officer in MEC and play an active role on the Steering Committee were the result of the donor's risk adverse management style. This was understandable given the complex operating environment in Myanmar at that time, but the secondment of a staff member to the MEC Management Team, however well intentioned by DFAT management and sensitively executed by the individual concerned, has had the effect of further confusing lines of programme management and accountability. With hindsight, it might have been better if DFAT had insisted on staff strengthening within the Management Team itself in order to assist MEC management and liaise with the donors. At the end of the current seconded post-holder's posting in February 2015, DFAT should adopt a more hands off approach, combined with higher expectations of service from its contract holder.

#### **4.4.5 Monitoring and evaluation**

The MEC Management Team take M&E seriously and has a section of staff dedicated to it, supported by Save the Children Australia's Program Quality team. A great deal of effort has been made to identify indicators and data requirements and to reconcile these with the programme logframe. Much effort has also been made instructing sometimes-reluctant

local partners in the necessity for data collection and reporting. As noted above central demands for data returns have been the source of some resentment in some quarters and MEC has been criticised for its heavy-handedness.

A fundamental problem the MEC M&E team face is that the logframe is geared primarily to the Founding Partner service delivery projects. It has quantifiable indicators expressed as numbers of beneficiaries and facilities provided. It is not an appropriate monitoring tool for the grant management side of the programme. While the grant projects all have service delivery elements, other means of assessing progress and success are needed, which are not to do with beneficiary numbers.

Quantitative indicators give a strong disincentive for working in hard-to-reach areas, because the numbers will always be low relative to effort and cost. Their direct contribution to wider enrolment and completion outcomes is likely to be miniscule. More subtle criteria are required that provide positive incentives, which recognise the extent to which hard-to-reach populations have been reached. Success could be calibrated in terms of the contributions the projects make towards developing systems, establishing equivalence and convergence with government provision. Alternatively it could be measured by the extent to which pathways and opportunities have been opened for hard-to-reach populations to escape the restrictions on their life chances that circumstances have imposed on them. The creation of shared learning, through research, information management and targeted communications, could also be important success criteria.

The current logframe sets inappropriate targets and success criteria and should be revised for the period beyond the end of the Founding Partner projects. The urgency for this will largely depend on whether another grants round is agreed. Once more meaningful output indicators are determined, the M&E team will need to assess data requirements against the new indicators and decide how much of the data currently collected from the existing grant projects remains relevant.

If there is to be a further round of grants, the MEC would be well advised to ensure that monitoring and reporting requirements are set out in advance. If necessary, reporting and data collection requirements should be negotiated to ensure that all parties are aware of the conditions on which the grants are provided. MEC should also ensure that the programme's reporting requirements do not put anyone in danger and do not create unreasonable burdens and risks for organisations working in difficult circumstances. This may help to avoid some of the problems experienced in the first round.

For some categories of grants, particularly those awarded to ethnic education groups, data reporting expectations may need to be lowered. This may be an immediate challenge for the MEC Management Team, but it is ultimately a matter for the development partners who will have to decide on the degree of accountability they expect and the risk they are willing to incur. The prime determinant of grant funding should be an organisation's ability to meet a recognised need, rather than its ability to report or provide data. There should, of course, be a commitment to principles of accountability and reasonable expectations of evidence collection, but this will necessarily vary based on the conditions under which each organisation is working.

## 4.5 Reporting

After a shaky start, programme reporting on a half-yearly basis is now producing useful information, although the effort required both for report writers and readers is considerable. With the end of the Founding Partner projects the level of detail will reduce and this will allow reporting to be streamlined. To date MEC has focused on establishing

partner reporting systems. Consolidated reports are currently produced exclusively for the donors, for reasons of contract compliance.

MEC is missing an important opportunity to deliver evidence-based messages to a wider audience. Considerable effort has been expended on advocacy, but plans to develop a research agenda aimed at finding out which aspects of the programme work well and which do not and publicising the results have not yet been put into practice. The programme needs to build a body of documented evidence that can be managed in ways that might be useful as a means of improvement or replication elsewhere. The MTR found little evidence of attempts to capture learning across the different activities covered by MEC.

A communications manager has only recently been recruited. MEC had previously relied on part-time access to the Save the Children Communications Officer. It is hoped that this appointment will now allow coherent identification of audiences and efforts to tailor messages and choice of media appropriately.

The influence of the Founding Partner projects on local grant-funded projects has been limited, even though much was made in the programme design of the cross over of ideas and experience and the resulting synergies. The Founding Partner projects appear to have operated largely within their own silos. In section 5 the MTR team propose a far higher profile for research, knowledge management and communications.

## **5 Priorities for the rest of the programme and beyond**

### **5.1 A revised focus**

The imminent closure of the Founding Partner projects provides an opportunity to reassess the purpose of the MEC: to decide what it is and what its priorities should be.

One option for the future is to maintain the present level of the grants portfolio and cease the MEC once the current grants expire in 2016. Lessons could be learned from the experience, which might be relevant to future grant management projects. If this path is adopted, the scope for identifying priorities for the future is restricted. The portfolio of grants is already determined.

Reorientation of MEC's focus would require at least one more grants round. Assuming this were to start in 2015 and the pattern of three-year grants were maintained, it could only be achieved with an extension of the MEC to at least 2018. It would also require a further financial commitment from Development Partners, although, as there may be some savings in the budget, the extent of this would have to be determined.

The discussion of priorities that follows is based on the premise that the MEC will continue at least two years beyond its current end date and that the requisite funding will be forthcoming.

The MTR suggests that the guiding objective of the MEC should be:

*To support non-government education mechanisms to benefit children whom the government system is not reaching.*

This primarily includes support to thematic and geographical areas or population groups where government is unlikely to be providing services in the next 5-10 years, and areas into which government should not expand, due to risks associated with conflict sensitivity.

The emphasis on non-government mechanisms does not mean support for some vague notion of Civil Society development as a principal goal. It means working with a variety of CSOs in order to further education objectives. CSOs are means to an end not ends in

themselves. Their development should be seen as a happy consequence of the programme, rather than a purpose.

The use of CSOs as vehicles for educational objectives has implications for the concept of 'partnership'. This is a much-used term, which is loaded with different meanings. MEC, as a grant provider, is not an equal partner with grant recipients. Grants are conditional. At a basic level this means that the funding is provided in anticipation of agreed services, but it also means that certain policies and ways of working are agreed, e.g. child safeguarding and financial due diligence. This does not mean that the relationship has to be hard-nosed and starkly commercial. MEC can work in collaborative and friendly ways towards common goals with grant recipients, but it is important to manage expectations so that everyone knows the nature of the 'partnership' relationship. This may seem like laboring the point, but clarity of purpose and perception are crucial and both have been lacking in the programme to date.

The redefined objective is consistent with the current emphasis on capacity building and organisational development of grant recipients, both actual and potential. It is also consistent with the MEC's role as convener and facilitator of non-government organisations capitalizing on opportunities as they arise for engagement on education policy in discussions with government. MEC should therefore continue both these activities.

The MTR endorses the current emphasis on the hard-to-reach populations. However, if this is to be more than an empty phrase it has implications on what MEC does and where. A concentration on the hard-to-reach provides MEC with a clear rationale and a niche vis-à-vis other funding mechanisms. It will address a huge unmet need, using funding instruments that are appropriate to the issues involved. Moreover, it has a strong potential to make a difference. However, there are inevitable limitations on resources and absorptive capacity. MEC cannot do everything. Trade offs are unavoidable and a concentration on areas of greatest need, will mean concentration either thematically or geographically, or both.

The predominance of ECCD in the grants portfolio should be reduced and replaced with an emphasis on children of primary, middle and secondary age groups. This is not because a need for early years provision does not exist, but because it is already a crowded field (UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision and a number of local NGOs) and one in which the government is now taking some responsibility, through its commitment to school-based ECCD in its 'Quick Wins' agenda. In an education system in which a disappointingly high proportion of children miss out on education entirely and enter the workforce with very few of the benefits that exposure to education brings, the priority for the MEC should surely be in supporting educational opportunities for basic and secondary school aged children. Commitments in relation to current grant projects should be honored, which will mean MEC will continue to have a significant interest in ECCD for the next two or so years. There is still scope for MEC to have an influence on ECCD policy and to contribute to the debate on the need for more innovative and cost-effective approaches to delivering holistic ECCD services, beyond the provision of ECCD centres. However, the MTR team recommends that ECCD should not be a priority for any future grants round.

In keeping with the hard-to-reach principle, the major priorities for MEC should be:

- Children in complementary basic education systems:

Complementary education covers a broad spectrum of non-government provision, including faith-based and community education. The accreditation of monastic education to allow children in monastic schools to transfer to higher levels of government education provides a possible model of convergence that could be developed for other non-government schools.

- Children in ethnic education systems:



Although ethnic education is a sub-group of complementary education, the issues are very different and require different considerations from faith-based or community education. It includes thematic areas such as mother-tongue instruction and linkages with Myanmar language. The aim is not integration with government systems, but rather the establishment of equivalence standards and eventual convergence over time.

- Out-of-school children, particularly adolescents:

Work with out-of-school children encompasses the standard non-formal education responses (literacy, numeracy and life skills), but also livelihoods education and the creation of opportunities and pathways for more productive lives relevant to the local context. Given the size of the out-of-school population, this is a relatively neglected field. Improving the life chances of children outside the formal education system and enhancing their ability to earn a living will need more imagination than merely repeating tired literacy and life skills courses and the usual vocational solutions of sewing for girls and welding for boys. Current approaches to non-formal education are worthy but unimaginative. There is scope for support to innovation and local level initiatives, which could provide models for application on a wider scale.

- Children with disabilities:

The education of children with disabilities, should move beyond the rhetoric surrounding “inclusive” education and explore intelligent and cost-effective ways of identifying and prioritising a broad range of special needs support. There is scope for going beyond a focus on physical disability - children requiring medical attention or assistive devices - to look at the full spectrum of disabilities, with a greater focus on learning needs, for example through the provision of remedial support. The principles of equity, which is fundamental to discussions of disability, should also infuse the rest of the programme, so that all funded projects are disability-aware.

- Cross-cutting themes

The pursuit of gender equity, conflict sensitivity and sustainability should remain important crosscutting themes.

These priorities pose considerable challenges. A focus on the hard-to-reach implies hard-to-do and, possibly, hard-to-succeed. MEC management is already aware that complementary education, particularly ethnic education can involve a complex set of expectations and sensitivities. Out-of-school children are by definition hard to help as they have already dropped through the education net. A focus on special needs education will require considerable shifts in attitudes in order to succeed.

Moreover, relatively little is known about the capacity amongst existing CSOs to scale up delivery in these areas or to use more innovative approaches. Identifying suitable candidates for funding, beyond the current batch of organisations that have already accessed donor funding, may be a challenge. If such organisations exist they may be working at a small scale and have limited organisational capacity.

Development Partners will have to be prepared to shoulder a degree of risk beyond their normal comfort zone and may need to be flexible on issues of compliance and reporting. It would greatly assist the MEC if the donors were clearly to set out the parameters of acceptability on these issues.

Success in the target areas will need to be measured not primarily in terms of service delivery throughput, but by reaching the most hard-to-reach children in the target age groups and by the creation of opportunities for children to sustain livelihoods by progressing to employment or other forms of education and training. Thus successful projects will be

those that open up educational opportunities, promote equivalence or create points of convergence with the formal education system. Success will also be measured by the extent to which innovations are documented, analysed and translated into different contexts. A logframe based on such indicators would be very different from the existing logframe.

## 5.2 Pre-requisites for the future of MEC

In order to embark on a journey to reach the hard-to-reach, several essential elements need to be in place.

1. Before anything else, there needs to be a clear commitment on the part of the donors that this is the direction they want to go. It will involve a sizable funding commitment for at least the next four years. It will also involve a willingness to forgo the simple service delivery targets and an appetite for higher levels of risk than those to which they are accustomed. These risks will be financial and reputational. There will also be security risks and the programme should not ask any partners to take on security risks beyond those they already face in their current work. Consistency of donor support will be crucial. Once they have made this commitment and have satisfactory programme management arrangements in place, the donors should aim to intervene only at the governance level and avoid too much involvement in management.
2. The staff of MEC needs to be augmented with appropriate levels of technical expertise. The MEC is currently staffed for grant management. It needs broader capacity. In particular it needs:
  - a. A Director with sufficient vision to lead the MEC and draw in outside assistance when needed. Essential elements of the person specification should be well-developed management competence and the people skills to navigate through the tricky terrain of relationship management.
  - b. The MEC Management Team needs access to high levels of education expertise and experience. This has not been forthcoming from the Founding Partners. The high-quality technical support and quality assurance provided by Save the Children needs to be coordinated and timed to meet programme needs.
  - c. MEC has insufficient knowledge of the political economy of the non-government education sector or the shifting context of ethnic education. This is available both within Myanmar and from outside, although advice in this area is not always impartial. It is noticeable that all members of the MEC Senior Management Team are expatriates. MEC should consider engaging appropriate nationals, including those from ethnic minority groups, to positions of greater responsibility; in order to deepen the level of collective local knowledge and experience.<sup>16</sup>
  - d. MEC needs the facility to buy in technical specialists on a consultancy basis. The usual INGO salary levels are unlikely to attract the right calibre of specialists.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The assumption that national staff are necessarily more politically sensitive should not go unchallenged. The MTR can report one instance of a visit related to ethnic education, in which the MEC national staff member had obviously established excellent working relations. However, comments from another ethnic group were critical of the attitude of MEC national staff.

<sup>17</sup> The salary and benefits paid by Save the Children is also an issue for attracting and retaining suitably experienced local staff.



- e. The first priority for TA inputs is a series of situation analyses of the new target areas and the development of technical strategy papers to map out the MEC approach. Consultation is a vital part of this strategy development process in order to fully understand the issues involved and ensure appropriate sensitivity in each of the priority areas
  - f. The second priority for TA is M&E support to develop a new logframe. MEC's existing M&E and capacity building functions will need to be developed in ways that are tailored as much as possible to specific grant project objectives and organisational strengthening. Lessons need to be learned to avoid negative perceptions of compliance requirements and central data needs.
  - g. MEC needs to develop a systematic and rigorous approach to research, knowledge management and communications. Research and learning across the programme and more broadly in the sector, should be seen as major components of MEC's contribution to educational outcomes. The current attention given to advocacy should be reduced in favour of a more intellectually robust and evidence-based approach to learning.
3. A new governance framework is required that is focused on four key areas: setting the strategic direction; setting the underlying policy parameters (principles of child safeguarding, fiduciary control and equity); holding MEC management to account; and maintaining oversight of the budget. The rest is management. Changes in the composition of the Steering Committee need to be complemented by rewritten terms of reference. In addition, provision should be made for some form of consultative process involving Civil Society interests and local expertise, either through non-executive members of the Steering Committee or a separate advisory panel.
4. A crucial prerequisite is a conducive management structure. This should allow the MEC Director the autonomy to exercise leadership and provide supportive line management with clear lines of communication and accountability through to the contract managers. For their part, the contract managers need to ensure that their whole organisation presents a cohesive and consistent position vis a vis the donors and that there are no conflicts of interest between work channeled through the MEC and any other work the organisation is pursuing in Myanmar. This does not require a subjugation of other work to that of the MEC, but it does require a convincing explanation of the articulation of work streams and a wholehearted commitment by all the relevant parts of Save the Children to the MEC.

### 5.3 Options for future programme management

There are three main options for the management of the redefined MEC. As has already been mentioned, the first option is to leave the programme largely undisturbed for the next two years. This is not the preferred option of the MTR nor, it would seem, the donors. However, it remains a viable option if efforts to explore the other options reach unsatisfactory conclusions.

The second option is for the donors to tender for a new programme with different management arrangements. This would mean inviting international bids for a managing agent. This could start as early as mid 2015, assuming the necessary documentation could be prepared in time. A new round of grants geared to the redefined priorities could then start in 2016. However, this would mean closing down the Save the Children contract and putting in place adequate interim arrangements to manage the existing grant portfolio commitments. This might be judged too messy a course of action to embark upon.

Alternatively the bidding process could be timed so that the new programme starts in early 2017 after the current contract with Save the Children expires. The main advantage of using a managing agent lies in clearer lines of accountability and responsiveness to donor requirements. Another advantage is that it avoids conflicts of interest of the sort that can arise with INGO grant agreements.

The major disadvantage of using a managing agent is lack of experience of working in Myanmar. Although obtaining the requisite authorisation to operate in the country is no longer the hurdle it used to be, few of the reputable management firms are yet operating at any scale in Myanmar. They would have to learn the ropes fast, establish local contacts and networks and buy in local knowledge. Given the sensitivity of the work, this would be a risk. On the other hand, some commercial firms are quite nimble and adept at learning fast. Their lack of track record means they lack the 'baggage' that comes with working in a country over a long period.

The third option is to stick with the current management arrangements through Save the Children and extend the programme with a further re-focused round of grants starting in 2015. This would have the major advantage of continuity and access to a deep well of institutional experience, built up over many years. It would also avoid the disruption to established procedures and systems that changing to a managing agent would entail.

However, this option would only be viable if there were changes to the current management model within Save the Children. These changes need to include clearer lines of line management, roles and responsibilities, communication and accountability. They should address the apparent issues concerned with the budgetary provision for staff costs and overheads. There also needs to be an agreement on the articulation of MEC and the rest of the Save the Children Country Programme, so that any Save the Children activities that might potentially conflict with those of the MEC are fully discussed with the funding development partners and actions that might compromise the commitment to the MEC are avoided.

In the recommendations below, the MTR team suggests that DFAT, as the contracting entity, should request Save the Children Australia, as the contract holder, to submit a management proposal that explains how the conditions set out above will be met. Development Partners should aim to reach decisions on the future of the programme by March 2015 at the latest.

## **6 Conclusions**

### **6.1 Overall performance**

MEC personnel have achieved pockets of success. The Founding Partner projects have mostly met expectations, grant management processes are in place and MEC is participating well in policy discussions. However Myanmar has moved on and what seemed reasonable objectives in restricted circumstances when the programme was designed now seem unambitious. Overall performance has been hampered by the lack of clarity and consensus about what MEC is and what its main purpose should be. With sharper thematic targeting and more realistic success criteria, MEC has the potential, in the more open context that now exists, to make a greater contribution to children who are not catered for by the government education system.

## 6.2 Governance and management

Governance and management has been ill conceived and poorly executed. MEC, the Founding Partners, the contract holder and the donors should share responsibility for this. Proposed reforms to the Steering Committee show that systems can be fixed. With a clearer distinction between governance and management and redefined management roles and responsibilities, better communication, responsiveness and accountability is possible. The parameters of MEC autonomy should be redefined and the technical expertise of its staff should be strengthened. The budget should be re-examined in order to provide assurance of value for money.

## 6.3 Delivery

The Founding Partner projects are using appropriate delivery mechanisms to meet service delivery objectives and logframe targets. However the models adopted have relatively limited targets, reflecting what was thought possible in a restrictive political context. Replication at scale of the chosen development models would not be affordable. The provision of grants to local CSOs is an innovative approach with potential, but the current scale of operation is small and unlikely to have much impact on stated 'hard-to-reach' targets. Current grantee selection procedures have worked as planned, but they need to be modified in order to impact genuinely hard-to-reach targets. More purposive targeting will involve deep understanding and engagement in the political economy of target groups and very sensitive handling. Aiming to impact more difficult targets would also entail greater risks and this will need the whole-hearted and consistent backing of the donors.

## 6.4 Learning

There have been disappointing levels of learning across the programme. There has been little cross influence amongst the Founding Partners and their influence on other civil society organisations has been limited. M&E and reporting has mainly been directed towards the donors for contract compliance purposes. The current emphasis on advocacy should be dropped in favour of a much more rigorous and purposeful concentration on research, knowledge management and communications. This should be reflected in the staffing profile of the MEC Management Team.

## 6.5 Future potential

The idea of providing support to the education of children for whom government services are not providing is sound and this need is likely to endure for some time. Grant funding is an appropriate modality, but it needs to be tied in to a strategic purpose rather than scattered piecemeal amongst non-government organisations that happen to meet selection requirements. MEC needs a clearer focus and conducive programme management architecture to enable it to fulfil its potential. The proposed path is not easy and success will have to be defined in ways other than service delivery numbers. Higher levels of reputational and financial risk will be involved. Donors and implementers will need to be aware of this and be willing to hold their nerve throughout.

## 7 Recommendations

			Action by
1	A decision on future donor support	Because so much else depends on the choice of donor strategy, in principle decisions on future support beyond 2016 need to be made immediately.	DFAT, DFID, DANIDA and possibly other donors
2	Agreement on the purpose and thematic refocusing of the MEC	Assuming MEC continues to further grants rounds, agreement is needed by March 2015 on the purpose of the MEC and re-focused priorities in terms of thematic areas and target population groups. MEC should cease to be predominantly focused on ECCD and target the equivalence and convergence aspects of non-government provision for school-age children and young adults through complementary education, ethnic education, non-formal support for the out-of-school and children with disabilities.	Donors, Save the Children and MEC Management Team
3	A revised management plan	By the end of March 2015, Save the Children Australia should submit a revised management plan for the MEC addressing the issues raised by the MTR of line management, communications and accountability and explaining the articulation of the MEC with other Save the Children activities in the Myanmar country strategy and programme. The issue of overhead charges should also be addressed. Donors should decide before the end of April 2015, whether the proposed arrangements meet their requirements. If they do not, donors should investigate other options for managing the MEC, including the option of closing the current contract early.	Save the Children and Donors
4	Donor contract management	Assuming adequate management arrangements can be agreed and put in place, DFAT (as the principal donor and contracting entity) should step back from day-to-day management involvement in MEC. It should confine its attentions to strategic governance and insist on higher standards of management from the contract holder.	DFAT with other donors' agreement
5	Revised Theory of Change	A revised Theory of Change and new logframe will be needed with indicators appropriate to extending education to hard-to-reach populations. These	Donors, Save the Children and MEC Management Team

	and logframe	documents should be completed by the end of May 2015.	with TA assistance
6	Staff strengthening for MEC	The level of autonomy and reporting in the terms of reference for the MEC Director need to be reviewed and put in place for the commencement of the new Director's employment. MEC needs to be empowered to engage high quality specialist TA to access advice on education and political economy. The Management Team also needs to be strengthened in terms of research, knowledge management and communications.	MEC Management Team, Save the Children, Donors
7	MEC strategy	MEC will need to develop strategies for targeting to ensure grants go where intended for greatest impact. MEC should develop strategies through consultation, based on the identification of targets, realistic success criteria and assessment of risk and conflict sensitivity for each of its priority areas. Strategy documents should be agreed by June 2015.	MEC Management Team supported by TA.
8	MEC's role in policy discussions	MEC's role as a convener and facilitator of civil society inputs into policy discussions with government should be continued.	MEC Management Team, Donors
9	Education in Emergencies	MEC should retain the facility to provide emergency assistance to CSOs. However, this should be integrated as part of the grant management function, rather than regarded as a separate component of the programme.	MEC Management Team

## Annex 1 Terms of Reference

### Mid-Term Review of the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC)

#### 1. Introduction

Decades of political isolation and economic stagnation in Myanmar have slowed progress on all aspects of human development. The education sector has previously suffered from low levels of investment and deliberate neglect. This has resulted in widespread challenges to the provision of quality basic education for Myanmar's children. Education governance and service delivery in Myanmar is complex. The formal Government education system exists alongside monastic and other religious systems, education systems run by ethnic minority groups in conflict areas and local community provided services across the country. Whilst a majority of children in Myanmar attend Government schools, a significant minority, many of whom represent the poorest and hardest to reach populations, participate in alternative or 'informal' education systems. Overall education outcomes in Myanmar are poor, with only 54% of children completing primary school and less than 50% of teachers properly trained (in the Government system) with this figure reportedly lower in non-Government schools.

The Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) is a civil society support program that was established by Australia and the United Kingdom in partnership with Save the Children, World Vision and the Burnet Institute. Australia has committed \$23m to MEC and the United Kingdom \$5.8m 2012 – 2016. The Danish Government has recently also provided funding to MEC approx. \$1 million in 2014 through their Embassy in Thailand.

The intended *impact* of MEC is “increased number and proportion of children in Myanmar accessing and completing quality basic education. The *outcome* of MEC is “innovative, coordinated and quality driven community and complementary education services that ensure more children and particularly the hardest to reach are ready to enter primary education and greater opportunity exists for children to gain quality learning in complementary education systems”.

The MEC was designed to complement the UNICEF managed Quality Basic Education Program (QBEP) and shares the same intended impact. While QBEP works in the Government system, the MEC focuses on supporting the non-Government education sector, targeting those children unable to access formal education. MEC currently partners with civil society organisations in religious, ethnic and community education to build their capacity and provide services for the hardest to reach. The MEC is structured according to five components focusing on: early childhood care and development; complementary basic education; civil society engagement in policy debate; non-formal education for out-of-school children; and, education in emergencies. Under each of these components fit several specific Outputs (refer to Annex A – Logframe). Crosscutting issues gender, disability inclusion, child protection and sustainability transect each of the five components. Conflict sensitivity and ways of working in conflict-affected areas are becoming increasingly important to MEC's operations as the program expands its reach through new grant partners.

The expected results of MEC include access to early childhood education for more than 55,000 three to five year olds; basic education for more than 160,000 children; and training for 4,500 non-government school teachers and 2,500 monastic school administrators and principals. Implementation of the MEC began in early 2013 and continues until the end of

2016. Since inception MEC, has operated in a context of political change, greater openness to external assistance and implementation of major Government lead reforms in the education sector and ongoing negotiations for a national ceasefire and lasting political settlement with ethnic armed groups.

A mid-term review of MEC has been commissioned jointly by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the UK Department for International Development. The mid-term review provides an opportunity to review current arrangements and build on the experiences of MEC thus far.

In particular, the mid-term review will examine three core aspects of quality/effectiveness, governance/program management and monitoring/evaluation. It will also review cross cutting issues of disability inclusion, gender equity, sustainability, child protection and MEC's approach to working in conflict-affected areas. It will include an assessment of Save the Children Australia as contract manager.

MEC partners will consider the findings of the review to refine the focus of the MEC and make adjustments, as required, to accelerate the achievement of equitable and sustained outcomes for the beneficiaries and to consider what a successor program could incorporate.

The MEC was funded as a "rolling design" to be reviewed annually and at key junctures such as by the mid-term review. The design of the program is considered flexible in order to be responsive to changes in context and to the findings reviews.

The findings of the mid-term review will be shared with all stakeholders.

## **2. Purpose of the Review**

The review will advise MEC donors on whether the programs progress, scope, and governance arrangements are responding effectively to education priorities in Myanmar focusing on the non-government education sector, and, make recommendations to MEC and donor support to ensure the program is optimally addressing Myanmar's education needs.

The MTR will address the following specific questions:

**1) Is MEC on course to meet its desired impact of *increased number and proportion of children accessing and completing quality basic education*? This should include analysis of:**

- Progress of MEC in achieving its stated purpose, outcome, and outputs with reference to each of the five program components.
- Whether the Founding Partner projects are successfully delivering results and achieving their targets
- Factors enabling or blocking the delivery of results.
- To what extent the crosscutting issues of gender, disability, child protection, and sustainability are being effectively addressed and integrated into how MEC contributes to improved and equitable education outcomes for disadvantaged children.
- The MEC's approach pursuing gender equality through the program and progress in empowering girls.
- The MEC's approaches including: the grants model, capacity development, advocacy, partnership, networking and research.

- Whether MEC is accessing and working with the most relevant education partners to achieve the program objectives.
- Whether the strategic direction of MEC remains appropriate and is able to respond to the evolving needs of the education sector.
- The extent to which MEC is adopting appropriate ways of working in conflict-affected contexts.
- What (if any) are the positive or negative unintended or unplanned consequences of the MEC?

**2) How effective are the MEC governance structures, management arrangements and donor funding to the MEC and the grants mechanism? This should include analysis of:**

- Whether the governance and management approaches are appropriate to achieve desired operational and implementation outcomes of the program.
- Oversight, decision-making and accountability arrangements between the MEC Management Team, Save the Children Australia and Save the Children International Myanmar.
- Performance of the MEC Management Team staff in managing and implementing MEC.
- Performance of Save the Children Australia as “lead” organisation, contract holder, and provider of technical and management support.
- Whether the MEC program and management approach provides good value for money
- Whether the MEC Program Design requires revision to remain relevant to the Myanmar education sector operating environment and to capitalise on MEC’s comparative advantage.
- The quality of planning documentation including the Program Design Document and associated documentation.
- The potential for sustainability of the MEC model.
- Coordination between implementing partners and MEC.
- Coordination between/engagement with MEC and other stakeholders including the Government of Myanmar.
- Systems for and implementation of financial management, risk management, due diligence

**3) How effectively is MEC being monitored and evaluated? This should include analysis of:**

- The robustness of the overall MEC M&E approach and how this is conveyed to and undertaken by partners and overseen by the MEC M&E unit.
- How data of the program’s outputs and outcome are collected and how data quality assurance is undertaken.
- The collection of data disaggregated by sex, disability, ethnicity and geographical location and opportunities for understanding and responding to trends.
- Whether the M&E system provides timely information on project progress and impacts, including measuring enrolment and completion outcomes.
- How the results of MEC monitoring and evaluation activities are disseminated and shared with partners in the education sector and the Government of Myanmar
- The extent to which the MEC practices continuous improvement, identifying areas for improvement of activities and applies lessons learned.



**4) How effectively MEC is responding to evolving opportunities and development priorities of the education sector? This should include analysis of:**

- The response of MEC to emerging issues in the education sector brought about by sector reform.
- How MEC is responding to the context of the ongoing peace process and its impact on the education sector

**5) Make recommendations on priority areas for focus of MEC for the remaining two years of the program.**

- This should include any suggestions for changes to the existing governance arrangements, management arrangements, monitoring and evaluation of activities and any changes to strategy, scope and program structure.
- This section may also consider recommendations regarding the strategic direction of MEC beyond the current contract period and suggestions on possible program management approaches going forward

### **3. Methodology and timeframe**

The evaluation will take around 5 weeks and is planned for November/December 2014, with an in-country mission to be held during the last two weeks of November 2014. The proposed timeline of the evaluation will be confirmed based on the evaluation plan (including methodology) to be developed by the team leader in consultation with the evaluation team and provided for comment by donors, MEC, Save the Children Australia and other partners.

Specifically, the team will undertake the following steps:

- i. Conduct a desk study involving:
  - review and appraisal of background documents (up to three days)
  - the development of an evaluation plan (including the methodology), field research guide and instruments and identification of key respondents and further documentation required. The plan will indicate the roles and responsibilities of each team member for data collection, analysis and reporting (up to 3 days including incorporating feedback from donors and MEC).
- ii. Participate in a briefing via teleconference or video conference with Save the Children Australia and MEC.
- iii. Participate in a briefing session with the MEC Management Team at the start of the in-country visit.
- iv. Participate in a briefing session with Australian and UK representatives as primary donors and commissioners of the review.
- v. Conduct consultations with the MEC Management Team, donors, core partners and stakeholders.
- vi. Conduct visits to relevant sites.
- vii. Conduct in-country team discussions, document reviews and data analysis where appropriate.
- viii. Participate in a MEC partner debriefing session in Myanmar at the completion of the in-country visit to present initial findings of the evaluation to MEC management team and partner representatives (total in-country mission duration up to 2 weeks).

- ix. Upon return from Myanmar, process information from document reviews, interviews and any other proposed methods; finalise evaluation (up to five days including incorporating comments and feedback on the draft report).
- x. Participate in review of the draft report with MEC donors and managers (including the MEC management team, Save the Children Australia and Save the Children International) via teleconference (1/2 day).
- xi. Undertake activities to distribute the findings of the review to encourage lessons learnt, as per the activities agreed in the evaluation plan.

The mid-term review will be undertaken by an external Review Team – composed of one international expert, one national consultant and two specialist staff members from donor agencies.

The Review Team will jointly participate in the in-country review. Each team member will be responsible for providing inputs to the evaluation and commenting on drafts, under the overall direction of the international expert. Review Team members will submit their documentation and findings to the Team Leader two weeks after the field visit for finalisation of the report and onwards submission to DFAT.

The Myanmar Education Consortium will support the Review Team by:

- arranging field visits for the team
- providing translation
- organising meetings with stakeholders
- providing necessary reports, documentation and other materials as required.

#### **4. Qualifications of the Review Team – M&E**

The team leader should have:

- At least 10 years' experience at a senior level in education policy and practice in developing country contexts.
- Demonstrated understanding of inclusive education and its relation to monitoring and evaluation.
- Extensive expertise and experience in program monitoring and evaluation of development programs including those financed through donor pooled funding mechanisms.
- Extensive expertise in assessing the effectiveness of development interventions delivered by civil society organisations.
- Experience with civil society-led education service delivery and organisational capacity development in an international development context.
- An understanding of the political context in Myanmar as it relates to education, peace and donor engagement in aid programs (desirable).
- Experience in conflict or post-conflict and ethnically diverse areas (desirable).

The specialist Myanmar consultant should have:

- In-depth knowledge of recent political and social reforms in Myanmar, particularly in education.

- In-depth understanding of the Myanmar education system and alternative education systems including the monastic system, community schooling and ethnic education departments - as well as of the Government system.
- Extensive expertise in education service delivery and civil society programs that include capacity development components.
- Excellent English and Myanmar language skills (written and spoken).

The specialist staff from donor agencies should have:

- Understanding of MEC objectives and strategic direction.
- In-depth knowledge of donor agency education service delivery and civil society programs that include capacity development components.
- Extensive expertise and experience in donor program monitoring and evaluation of development programs including those financed through donor pooled funding mechanisms.
- Understanding of recent political and social reforms in Myanmar, particularly in education, and an in-depth understanding of the Myanmar education system.

All team members should have the ability to travel intensively within Myanmar including to remote destinations for at least a two-week period starting mid-November and time to submit their respective reports two weeks after completion of the evaluation, with the final report due two weeks after this.

MEC and donors representatives may join the team for meetings and fieldwork.

## **5. Deliverables**

The review team will prepare an evaluation plan (including methodology) –draft to be submitted four weeks before the field visit; with the final plan submitted one week prior to in-country mission. The evaluation team will develop an evaluation plan based on the guidance in these ToRs. The plan will outline questions appropriate to the purposes of the evaluation, sampling strategy, methods and instruments for collecting data, data analysis techniques where appropriate; methods to communicate the lessons learnt; any challenges to achieving the evaluation purposes and how these will be addressed; and the roles and responsibilities of team members.

The Review Team will prepare a report including a description of the extent to which MEC's objectives are being achieved using Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Partially Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory ratings.

The review team will prepare an Aide Memoire that will be presented at the final briefing.

The Review Team will prepare a Review Report within one month of completion of fieldwork. The report will address the aim of the mid-term review, the specific questions outlined above, and any other issues agreed in the Methodology and Timeframe agreed with the donors and MEC.

Save the Children Australia, the MEC Management Team and Save the Children International Myanmar will have an opportunity to review a draft of the report in keeping with their MEC management responsibilities. They will have the opportunity to produce a management response to the review report.

## **6. Background documents and information**

MEC will provide an initial list of key documents. Consultants will search for additional literature and documents to supplement this list where necessary, which will form the basis of the desk review. Consultants will continue to source additional documents during the in-country mission to inform the final evaluation report.

## Annex 2 Schedule for the Review

Plan for MEC MTR						
Date	Day	Activity	Location	Mode of Travel	People in the Trip	Contact of the Trip Organizer
15-Oct	Wed	MTR Team Leader submits draft Evaluation Plan inviting comments			MTR TL & DFAT	MTR TL
06-Nov	Mon	MTR Team Leader submits revised Evaluation Plan			MTR TL & DFAT	MTR TL
w/b 10/11/2014		Post document review Skype discussions with MEC			MEC SMT	Craig
		Briefing by teleconference for MTR Team MEC Management Team, SC.			MTR Team, MEC	Craig
16-Nov	Sun	Arrival to YGN				
17-Nov	Mon	MEC Briefing and discussion	MEC Office, Yangon		Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Colin Bangay, Tom Parks + MEC Team	Craig
18-Nov	Tue	Travel to Hpa An – 7 hours	Hpa An Township, Kayin State	By Car	Stephen Baines, Colin Bangay, Tom Parks, Sandar Myo, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie, Craig Nightingale	MEC, Admin
		Meeting ECCD Network in SAVE ECCD Center	Pawt Htaw village, Hpa An Township, Kayin State	By Car	Stephen Baines, Colin Bangay, Tom Parks, Sandar Myo, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie, Craig Nightingale	Lu Sam, Program Manager-Education, lu.sam@savethechildren.org, 095187368
		Overnight in Hpa An				

19-Nov	Wed	ACS project site (Ethnic/Compl Educ) – Meeting with Ethnic Ed Dept Officials, visit to community managed primary school	Yay Phyu Village, Hpa An Township, Kayin State	By Car	Stephen Baines, Colin Bangay, Tom Parks, Sandar Myo, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie, Craig Nightingale	Maung Maung Myo Chan, Executive Director (0949770389, myochan1@gmail.com )	
		Overnight in Hpa An					
20-Nov	Thu	Travel to YGN – 7 Hours	YGN	By Car	Stephen Baines, Colin Bangay, Tom Parks, Sandar Myo, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie, Craig Nightingale	MEC, Admin	
		Visit OOSC NFE center & meeting with S4SK – Hlegu (near YGN)	Inn Dine Village Hleguu Township, Yangon Region	By Car	Stephen Baines, Colin Bangay, Tom Parks, Sandar Myo, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie, Craig Nightingale	Daw Aye Aye Thin, Project Manager (0973075774, ayeayethinnthinn11@gmail.co m )	
		Overnight in Yangon					
Team 1 – Mandalay							
21-Nov	Fri	Travel to Mandalay – early Morning	Mandalay	By Flight	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Hnin Pwint Kyaw Maung, Joseph K	MEC, Admin	
		1. Monastic Educ (Burnet)	Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School, Nanshwe, Aung Mye Thasan Township, Mandalay	By Car	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Hnin Pwint Kyaw Maung, Joseph K	Aung Ko Ko, Project Manager, aungkoko@burnetmyanmar.or g, 09254053316	
		2. NFE Center (WV) - evening	Htaryne (East) Ward, Aungmyaetharzan Township, Mandalay	By Car	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Hnin Pwint Kyaw Maung, Joseph K	Mya Sandi Aung, Education Programme Manager, 09423755610, Mya_Sandi_Aung@wvi.org	
		Overnight in Mandalay					

22-Nov	Sat	Travel to YGN – early morning (reach by afternoon)		By Flight	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Hnin Pwint Kyaw Maung, Joseph K	MEC, Admin	
Team 2 – Kachin (Shalom)							
21-Nov	Fri	Travel to Myitkina – air Reach by afternoon	Myitkina Township, Kachin State	By Flight	Tom Parks, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie	MEC, Admin	
		Discussion with KIO ED and Shalom	Myitkina Township, Kachin State	By Car	Tom Parks, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie	L. Aung Tsen, aungtsen@gmail.com	
		Overnight in Myitkyina					
22-Nov	Sat	Travel to YGN – afternoon (reach by evening)		By Flight	Tom Parks, Eva Oberg, Tamsin Coryn-Wyllie	MEC, Admin	
Team 3 – Yangon							
21-Nov	Fri	MILI Visit Dala (near Yangon) Inclusive Education	Thamine, Mayangone Township, Yangon Region	By Car	Colin Bangay, Alte B	Hlwan Moe Kyaw (09254210185)	
		Linguistic (Ethnic+ECCD) discussion - Afternoon	Hlaing Township, Yangon Region	By Car	Colin Bangay, Alte B	Naw Kuu Shee, Language and Development Coordinator, (09250185327, nawkhushee@gmail.com )	
22-Nov	Sat	Open					
23-Nov	Sun						
24-Nov	Mon	AM - Meeting with MEC SMT	MEC Office, Yangon	-	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Colin Bangay	Craig	
		PM - Meeting with SAVE, Burnet and WV	MEC Office, Yangon	-	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Colin Bangay	Lu Sam, Mya Sandi Aung, Karl Dorning	
25-Nov	Tue	Group meeting with YGN based new partners – Plan, Metta, KMSS, KBC – Morning	MEC Office, Yangon	-	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Colin Bangay	Craig	



		Meeting with MEC M&E Team- Afternoon	MEC Office, Yangon	-	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo, Colin Bangay	Joseph K
26-Nov	Wed	MTR Team Internal Meeting				
27-Nov	Thu	MTR Team Internal Meeting				
28-Nov	Fri	MTR Team Discussion with Donors	MEC Office, Yangon	-	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo	MTR Team & Donors
		Debriefing - Afternoon	MEC Office, Yangon	-	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo	MTR Team, Donors, MEC, Save
w/ b 01/12/2014		Meeeting with Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, Religious Affairs	Stephen Baines, Sandar Myo			
09-Dec	Tue	MTR Team provide agreed reports to TL	MTR Team			
17-Dec	Wed	TL sends draft MTR report to Team for comment	MTR Team			
31-Dec	Wed	TL submits draft report to DFAT, DFID, MEC and SC for comments	MTR Team			
15-Jan	Fri	Stakeholders provide comments on draft report	MTR Team			
22-Jan	Thu	Final report submitted	MTR Team			

## Annex 3 Aide Memoire presentation 28 November 2014

### Myanmar Education Consortium Mid-term Review

Debrief  
28 November 2014

1

### Background to the MTR

- Early days, but timing of MTR appropriate
  - Approaching end of Founding Partner projects
  - Appointment of a new MEC Director
  - Some rationalisation of governance arrangements has taken place
  - There have been teething problems
- Purpose
  - Assess what has worked well and what has not
  - Comment on activities but not a full evaluation
  - Make recommendations for future directions – themes and management/governance.

2

### The MTR process

- Extensive documentation provided
- Extremely useful programme of visits covering a wide range of activities and a range of well articulated views
- Acknowledge that it is not easy – travel authorisations
- MTR team has been made very welcome - thanks

3

### MEC – a game of two halves

- Conceived as
  - a way of gathering together existing INGO projects...
  - and something else that involved supporting civil society groups
  - working in the same areas as QBEP (the permitted zone)
- Now INGO projects ending
- The operating context has moved on
- MEC's raison d'être needs to inform the constituent parts – rather than the other way around

4

### Achievements

- MEC established and widely known
- Highly committed staff
- Founding partner projects – MTR witnessed solid achievements
  - ECCD model established and progress in policy dialogue
  - Impact of infrastructure and technical support to monastic schools
  - NFE centres meeting real needs and contributing to integrated community development
- Grant funding mechanisms and associated M&E and Capacity Development established

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### Main concerns

- Uncertainty about what MEC is
  - An education project?
  - A Civil Society development project?
  - A mechanism for alternative education provision?
  - A way of promoting the right to education?
  - A means of reaching the "hard to reach"
  - An outlet for Civil Society voice?
  - *Primus inter pares* in coalition of the willing
  - A consensus-based consortium
  - A fund management mechanism
  - A different wrapper for funding INGOs
  - A counter-balance for donor support for the government system (QBEP)
  - A multi-donor trust fund?
  - All, some or none of the above

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### A rolling design

- Programme started without consensus on what it was about
- No shortage of views – each demanding equal voice – but some more equal than others
- Management, governance and accountability structures that have been subject to conflicts of interest and divisiveness
- Tensions between donor expectations and INGO objectives
- The context is very different now from when MEC was designed
- Needs
  - Sharper focus and rationale
  - Clearer lines of management and accountability
  - Clarification whether this is an implementation model or a fund management model with delegated authority.
  - Clarification of where MEC fits in Save the Children strategy, because of potential conflicts of interest?

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### Leaps of faith in the theory of change

- A Civil Society Development programme?
  - CS too vague a concept to be the ultimate goal
  - CS too diverse and differentiated
  - MEC's claims on impact on civil society have to be reconciled with the niche in which it can make a credible impact
- As an education project MEC is:
  - not big enough in terms of numbers of beneficiaries (service delivery)
  - not focused enough in terms of targeting, innovation and staffing to be catalytic in changing systems and expanding educational opportunities
- Aspirations to impact hard to reach populations but staffing and systems to be an efficient fund manager

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### What should the focus be?

- MEC - support non-government mechanisms to reach children for whom government system is not providing
- Emphasis should be on:
  - Areas of greatest need – thematic and geographical
  - Hard to reach
  - Facilitating pathways and learning opportunities
  - Seeking linkages with government systems - convergence rather than integration
  - Developing systems and connections not just numbers of beneficiaries
  - Learning and communications
- Needs to be nimble, well informed and sensitive

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### Areas of focus

- Complementary education
  - Ethnic education
  - Linguistic mother tongue/Myanmar linkages
  - Other non-government – faith-based, community education
- Out of school children
  - NFE literacy and life skills
  - Livelihoods education – opportunities and pathways for more productive lives relevant to the local context
- Disabled children
  - Intelligent and cost-effective approaches to identifying and prioritising not just inclusion rhetoric
  - Equity principle to cut across the whole programme

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### What will success look like?

- Some focus on the numbers of beneficiaries
  - Not just on numbers trained/enrolled
  - emphasis on what they can now do that they couldn't previously
- Systems developed
- Pathways for learning opportunities opened up
- Exemplars of good practice established
- Lessons learned from innovations documented and shared
- Evidence of relations brokered between Civil Society groups and government

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### In order to succeed, what is needed?

- Continue what has been started
  - existing grant commitments
  - convening role in policy discussions
- Commit to an extension to allow further expanded round of 3-year grants based on priority themes
- Phase out support to ECCD
- Conduct situational analysis in priority areas - bringing in relevant expertise

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### What else is needed?

- Revised logframe outputs and indicators based on improvements in quality, convergence, learning and systems rather than just beneficiary numbers
- Grantee selection based on these characteristics
- An M&E function geared to assessing these things
- A capacity building function geared to individual project objectives and organizational strengthening
- A major work stream around communications and knowledge management

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### And a conducive management structure

- A director who can direct with clear lines of delegated authority and accountability
- A clear line management and support for the Director MEC
- A MEC unit that is adequately staffed for an increased workload
- Increased capacity for technical engagement – not just administrative mechanics

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### And a governance structure geared to:

- Agreeing the strategic direction of MEC
- Holding the MEC Director (and hence MEC) to account
- Ensuring key principles are adhered to:
  - Child protection
  - Fiduciary controls
  - Gender equity
  - Political/ethnic impartiality/sensitivity
- Oversight over the budget and spending

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### Options for the future

- Maintain current commitments for the next 2 years – gather learning then stop
- Tender for a new project to start in 2017 with different management arrangements
  - Managing agency
  - Eventual independent body
- Start a further expanded round of grants in 2015 conditional on:
  - revised focus areas
  - Strengthened staffing
  - improved SC management model