

**Independent Progress Review – Strategic Overview**  
**Partnerships for Improving Education (PIE)**

**Report to AHC Port Moresby**

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## Independent Progress Review – Strategic overview

### Partnerships for Improving Education

#### 1. Summary and recommendations

##### Key review question and observations

###### Context

- ✓ *From the outset the program was severely challenged to deliver the expected outcomes – there were two more provinces than originally envisaged in the design and no change to the budget; and, over time it has become apparent that the program needed to support more teachers (and students) than originally envisaged, as well as an overestimation of local capability and increased costs of doing business.*
- ✓ *It is likely that, if what is now known about the program scope and costs was applied to the initial design and plans, the 5-year budget would be significantly larger and close to the 8-year program allocation of AUD75m.*

##### KRQ1 – Relevance

*To what extent does the PIE design (Theory of Change) and implementation approach still appear to be relevant at this point?*

The design and conduct of the PIE Program continue to be relevant in terms of alignment with Australia's new Development Partnership Plan (DPP) 2024-2029<sup>1</sup> with PNG, GoPNG policies and priorities and with school system improvement research and practice.

- ✓ *The Program's relevance is evident in its alignment with the new Minister for Education's priorities for education and the PNG National Education Plan. Its relevance is also evident in the new Australia – Papua New Guinea DPP and learning from research into improving school systems.*
- ✓ *Based on this alignment the program design continues to be relevant, however, it is important that the focus continue to be on 'facilitating, testing, and monitoring innovative ways' and 'influencing policy and systems-based change', rather than trying to achieve positive change for all, across every target province.*

##### KRQ 2 – Effectiveness

*What progress has been observed in relation to the respective Intermediate and End of Program Outcomes? Which activities appear to be having a greater impact than others? Are there any activities which appear to have negligible to no impact to date, or not progressing as planned?*

At the 18-month implementation point considerable progress has been made in terms of the Program's core activities and results designed to deliver the Program's EOIOs. In a relatively short period of time the Program has made some notable achievements, including the Back-to-School campaigns in 2023 and 2024, the delivery of literacy training to teachers and support material for teachers and students, provision of home learning packs, and the necessary and welcome shift in policy development and approval.

Some activities have been delayed to varying degrees (against original timelines) e.g., school leadership and management training, disbursement of AQEFA grants. The planned parenting and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/australias-papua-new-guinea-development-partnership-plan-2024-2029>

health program is yet to commence due to challenges in outsourcing and the tighter budget situation.

While progress is evident, consistent with the Program's theory of change, it is too early to expect improved learning outcomes to be evident. Given the challenge that exists in delivering, at scale, improvements in student learning the Program should consider whether its capacity to measure and report improvements in teaching quality is sufficient.

- ✓ *Significant benefits would accrue from the program more frequently and systematically collecting and reporting data (quantitative and qualitative) to illustrate progress (or not) in relation to the theory of change and using this to report progress and/or inform decision making on next steps.*
- ✓ *Given the timeline for the program and the inherent difficulty of moving the student learning dial, the program has a clear focus on the quality of teaching - a core driver for improved student learning. However, there is a need to sharpen the program's description and measure of the quality of teaching - because this is what needs to improve first, before learning outcomes shift.*

### **KRQ 3 – Efficiency**

*To what extent is PIE implementation demonstrating value for money and providing an understanding of the cost of doing business in elementary/primary education in PNG in selected provinces?*

As the program has moved from design to inception and to implementation there has been significant learning about the cost of doing business in PNG and the four locations.

A CBA analysis, based on modelling results from similar programs, budgeted costs and target gains, concludes that PIE is a sound value for money investment. The Program has consistently sought to keep costs down, using resources as efficiently as possible. PIE has also benefited from the Shared Services arrangement with the Managing Contractor.

Data collection and reflection is a positive feature of the PIE program operation, however, based on experience and learning to date there appear to be some opportunities to refine data collection and reflection processes to enhance program learning.

- ✓ *The Program clearly seeks to build on its own research and learning (and from other programs); however, more strategic use of piloting and phasing of activities could enhance program learning and strengthen demonstration of value for money.*
- ✓ *The strategic focus and oversight of the program would be improved via a regular external strategic monitoring and advisory function (as initially proposed in the IDD) and more systematic engagement of DFAT / AHC personnel in key review / reflection activities. Increased DFAT/AHC involvement in strategic discussions could also strengthen their ability to engage in policy dialogue on key issues at high levels.*

## KRQ 4 – Sustainability

*At this point in the program are there any interventions that appear more likely than others of being sustained beyond the PIE project cycle? Why might this be so and are there any thoughts on what would be required to increase sustainability and replicability? Which interventions appear to be greatest value for money at this point in the program?*

The conduct of the Bilum Books workshops and follow-up teacher learning circles appear to have created desire amongst teachers for further teacher in-service training, resources and support which provides opportunity for professional engagement within and beyond schools. Further structured and regular in-service training events as well as the PIE TUF activity can be expected to build the momentum.

The Program has also made a significant contribution to the development of key policy documents that provide clarity about expectations in areas such as Teacher Development, GESI, Inclusive Education and School learning and improvement plans. Clarity about such areas provide a platform for further planning and implementation provincially and nationally.

Further support for development and implementation of such enabling activities, and a sharp focus across all Program activities will be important for momentum to be sustained and to maximise chances of success.

Continuing to support successful models of in-service training, including through budget planning and allocation, has the potential to encourage provincial and national departments to take steps to (re)introduce (quality) NIST and PIST programs.

Given NDoE budget limitations the Program and DFAT might consider further policy dialogue and advocacy work (in collaboration with WB PASA and other Development Partners) for NDoE and PDoE to allocate funds more efficiently to activities that evidence shows will improve learning.

- ✓ *Use of a longer-term vision (plan) for early years learning improvement in PNG (i.e. beyond the life of the current program) would contribute to a sharpened focus on sustainability through reflection on and influencing of program planning and activities, and engagement with partners.*

## KRQ 5 – Monitoring and Evaluation

*To what extent is the M&E system providing useful information in relation to the program IOs and EOPOs and for this progress review? To what extent does the M&E system appear to be appropriate for informing DFAT considerations for future investments / PIE phases?*

The M&E system is judged to be appropriate for reporting against the PIE IOs and EOIOs and has provided useful information for this review. The current M&E system would usefully inform DFAT on the effectiveness of the program and discussion about future phases.

However, there is value in streamlining the system and improving some elements, particularly the capacity to measure and report in teaching quality.

- ✓ *Strengthened Learning and Adaptation elements of the MERLA strategy could be combined with enhanced capacity and quality of communication activities and products, to showcase best practice and influence PNG education policy and practice.*
- ✓ *There is merit in the program strengthening in-progress assessment of effectiveness, in relation to teacher quality and improved student learning, to contribute to continuous program monitoring and to inform the need for and nature of any program adaptations.*

## **Recommendations**

- I. Program resourcing – Bring forward the Phase 2 budget allocation to the current phase, so that AUD75m is available for the remaining years of Phase 1.
- II. Strategic oversight and governance – Introduce a regular external strategic monitoring and advisory function.
- III. Program activity stock-take (and adjustment) – Undertake a program activity stock-take to decide on appropriate adjustments to program activities to improve effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.
- IV. Refine the MERLA framework – Draw on the PIE MES Review and experience to date to refine the MERLA strategy and framework.
- V. Strengthen strategic communication – Increase the Program’s collateral and capacity for public diplomacy and policy influence.
- VI. Adjust current provincial engagement – Review progress to date and prioritise next steps in each of the four locations to account for local context and priorities, and progress and learning to date.
- VII. Geographic expansion – PIE should not proceed to a 5th province in the short term. Rather, expansion to other provinces should be driven by GoPNG, with PIE support, informed by a longer-term plan for expansion and consultation with other partners, including the World Bank.

## 2. Purpose

This report is a response to a DFAT Port Moresby request to conduct an Independent Progress Review of the *Partnerships for Improving Education (PIE)* Program. The primary audience for this review is DFAT Port Moresby and Canberra.

## 3. Review Process

The DFAT Tasking Note for this Independent Progress Review proposed:

1. *A formative (year 2) review of PIE will enable DFAT to understand what changes may need to be actioned to ensure PIE's long-term success (and sustainability) and to inform DFAT considerations for future PIE phases and resourcing.*
2. *The overall review will have three separate but complementary components:*
  - i. *Cost benefit analysis of interventions impacting on student learning (Human Development Monitoring and Evaluation Services (HDMES)).*
  - ii. *Review (check) of the M&E System (HDMES).*
  - iii. *Strategic Overview: Theory of Change review, responses to the Key Review Questions including assumptions, risks and resource concerns. In addition to a desk review and in-country consultations, the final report will draw on findings from component i) and ii) to answer Key Review Questions and make recommendations to DFAT on resourcing, timing, any future programmatic shifts and further analysis required.*

The Independent Progress Review (Strategic Overview) was undertaken by Robert Randall, engaged on behalf of DFAT by the Strategic Development Group.

The Review took place between 29 July and 30 August 2024. It involved:

- a desk review of documents provided by Port Moresby Post
- initial (remote) interviews with key stakeholders
- in-country interviews / workshops with key stakeholders
- regular meetings with the client (DFAT POM).

## 4. Context

Partnerships for Improving Education (PIE) is an 8-year investment (2022-29) partnering with the Government of PNG to improve inclusive access to, and quality delivery of, early grades education (Prep to Grade 2). PIE is working in four locations representative of the four regions of PNG: Enga, Sandaun and Central provinces and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB). The program partners with National Department of Education (NDoE), Provincial Divisions of Education (PDoE) and Bougainville Department of Education (BDoE) to deliver on PNG's National Education Plan (NEP). The Program follows a 'working with' partner governments approach to encourage participation and sustainability.

PIE follows and builds on the PNG Partnership Fund (PPF) and works closely with the World Bank's Programmatic Advisory Services and Analytics (PASA) facility.

### From design to engagement

- ✓ *From the outset the program was severely challenged to deliver the expected outcomes – there were two more provinces than originally envisaged in the design and no change to the budget;*

*and, over time it has become apparent that the program needed to support teachers (and students) than originally envisaged, as well as increased costs of doing business.*

During development of the IDD the scope of the program changed from two provinces to four, with no variation to the resource allocation.

*The process for selecting the initial two provinces ... took into account, among other factors, the potential they offered for demonstrating effective approaches to system level change. ...*

*Subsequent to the initial design consultations, at the request of NDoE, additional provinces were added to ensure each geographic region is represented. (IDD, p.23)*

Design intentions on anticipated scope of activity, anticipated activity costs and budget allocation set out in the IDD provide a reference point against which the ‘reality’ and expectations met by the contractor can be compared (see discussion in the next section).

*The amount of AUD 23.2 million over 8 years is based on upgrading approximately 9002 early grade teachers and 80 supervisors per annum at a unit cost of AUD 3,000 per annum. (IDD p.67)*

*There is also an assumption that provinces will have adequate absorptive capacity to begin the program at a high level of activity and maintain this over a number of successive years. (IDD p.69)*

### **From inception to implementation**

- ✓ *It is likely that, if what is now known about the program scope and costs was applied to the initial design and plans, the 5-year budget would be significantly larger and close to the 8-year program allocation of AUD75m.*

Early in the Program’s life, it became apparent to the Program that a range of factors would add pressure to the operation of the program and the budget. These factors can be grouped into four broad categories, based on data provided by the Program, which are discussed below. The impact of these factors on the Program budget are illustrated in Table 1, representing an increase on budget allocations of AUD6.5m across four key activities from when activities were planned to implementation.

*Table 1:Increased costs due to population (provided by PIE program – August 2024)*

AUD (000's)	Bilum Books teacher texts <sup>3</sup>	Bilum Books student books <sup>4</sup>	Classroom libraries and readers <sup>5</sup>	Training costs <sup>6</sup>
Original budget estimates	2,013	2,000	768	3,520
Additional costs	2,500 (124% increase)	1,134 (57% increase)	339 (44% increase)	2,620 (74% increase)

<sup>2</sup> Compare this with more than 4000 elementary teachers receiving training up to June 2024 – see section 5.

<sup>3</sup> Increased requirement of teacher texts to ensure 1 per teacher and to meet needs of multigrade teachers.

<sup>4</sup> Initial plan to provide 10 student books per grade (1:3-book:student) was increased to meet needs of classes with more than 30 students.

<sup>5</sup> Decision taken to increase the supply of libraries and readers.

<sup>6</sup> Training costs increased due to population (more teachers, volunteer teachers and the requirement to accommodate babysitters); increased service delivery costs due to inflationary pressures also increased the training costs.

### Greater numbers than expected of teachers (and students)

Initial planning for rolling out Bilum Books (BB) training was based on data in the 2018 Education Management Information System (EMIS); however, the latest full school census (EMIS 2023) and face-to-face training data indicates that:

- teacher numbers (registered/on payroll) have increased by at least 7%<sup>7</sup>; and
- student numbers have increased by at least 14%.

Further, the Program reports that across three BB training locations there have been around 500 additional people present at training requiring accommodation. These have been both volunteer/unregistered teachers, who are often the only educator available in their location, and babysitters enabling the participation of primary caregivers. The additional participants have resulted in extra costs (food and additional beds in rooms) of around AUD790k (noting that this is not the full cost associated with genuine training participants).

From an implementation perspective the Program has found, throughout the rollout and delivery of training of trainers (TOT) and/or direct training, that Trainers and/or participants (i.e. teachers, Inclusive Education Outreach Officers) require additional training beyond initial plans and budgets, with such cases requiring additional expenditure (above budget) of AUD172k. Examples include:

- Mathematics Training: PIE held a TOT in Port Moresby in March 2024, which was followed by cascade training sessions in sub-national locations. As documented in the May Math Exception Report<sup>8</sup> concerns about participant content knowledge resulted in a follow-up mathematics TOT in May 2024.
- Teacher Learning Circle Refresher Training: Based on feedback from the Term 2 2023 Joint-Monitoring Visit, TLC phone survey and reflections from cohort 1 of the Bilum Books Literacy Training it became apparent that TLC Leaders did not understand and were not confident in their role. Refresher training<sup>9</sup> was conducted.
- Inclusive Education: In January, PIE delivered national training to IERC staff and PIE deployed IERC Outreach Officers, on the Inclusive Education Policy and associated implementation Guides. As outreach officers continued to report and display a lack of understanding about their roles, refresher training was conducted.

### Increased costs of doing business.

Global inflationary pressures and local events such as the January 10, 2024 civil disturbance have resulted in an increase in the cost of goods, services and program delivery. This has been evident in the cost of vehicle fuel, rental accommodation options for long-term advisers, hotels, venue hire for training and the cost of training materials and printing.

Examples include:

- The security situation in Enga has remained unstable since the 2022 national general election. Program implementation in Enga was heavily adjusted from March 2023 with a focus on emergency programming and governance systems strengthening. While some funds have been

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<sup>7</sup> Numbers do not include volunteer teachers, teachers who are supporting service delivery in remotest PNG. This increase does not include the number of teachers and students in newly established early grade schools.

<sup>8</sup> Math In-service TOT Exception Report May 2024

<sup>9</sup> See June 2023 Semi-Annual Report

diverted to other activities, the Program has incurred increased security and program costs for the activities that have occurred in 2023 and 2024.

- Increase in Air Niugini ticket prices of approx. 30% [Economy POM-Buka return tickets currently range from PGK1,800 to PGK4,800 depending on fuel availability and demand].
- ChildFund (School Leadership and Management training) have noted the impact of increased costs on their activity forecast, reporting a 54% increase in costs and requesting up to an additional AUD2m to deliver<sup>10</sup>.
- Long Term Adviser rental accommodation is no longer available at the 2022 rate of AUD8k per month with most now around AUD10k per month.
- In the 2024 Annual Workplan, the estimated cost for the Diploma in Primary Teaching (in-service) was AUD6,400 per person. However, after further discussion with the three HEIs, the actual average cost is estimated to be AUD10k per teacher. This increase is primarily due to the lack of local HEIs or staff in ARoB and Sandaun requiring Divine Word University to fly lecturers to these locations and hire partner venues.

#### Additional (unplanned) requests

Throughout implementation 2023-2024 additional programming requests were made which resulted in increased expenditure. For example:

- Home Learning Packs (Education in Emergencies programming for Enga: AUD850k).
- Commitment for EMIS reform – AUD2m, with AUD250k paid to date.
- Technical requests from National Government and Autonomous Bougainville Government, resulting in a greater than planned expenditure of the non-specified adviser (STA) budget – 50% (AUD1m) to date, with three more years of programming remaining.

#### **Compromises made to planned program activities.**

The program has sought to mitigate increased costs through variations to program deliveries, for example:

- Operating at 12% staffing against expenditure<sup>11</sup> vs Head Contract plan for 22% of personnel costs against activities
- Library for every class (procured enough for 1,500 classrooms rather than 5,500)
- Not purchasing protective storage box for Bilum Books (additional AUD420k plus distribution)
- Reduced TLC support and classroom monitoring
- Reduced scope for parenting program
- Limiting number of HEI lecturer participation in QUT co-design and lecturer training (only two lecturers per HEI per subject)
- Limiting School Leadership and Management Training to 3 participants per school (4 to 5 would be ideal, to ensure gender representation).
- Inability to provide (NDoE desired) head teacher training, which would have included school-based teacher appraisal and teacher mentoring.

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<sup>10</sup> This would include delivery in Enga as well. AUD1m additional not including Enga.

<sup>11</sup> Noting that the outsourcing of some activities e.g. school monitoring by World Vision will include some personnel costs

## 5. PIE at the 18<sup>th</sup> month of implementation

### Program progress

The program has recently passed the 18th month of implementation, following the initial inception period. Table 2, based on PIE progress reports provides a high-level summary of activity over this period.

Table 2: High-level summary of program activity to June 2024.

Activity	2023 activity (Source: 2023 APR p.5, 9)	2024 (to June) activity (Source: 2024 SAR p.6, 7)
<b>EOIO 1</b> <b>AQEFA fund</b> - allocates resources to schools to enhance enrolment and retention efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study design and sampling approach for the Achieving Quality Education for All (AQEFA) grant mechanism agreed</li> <li>Selection criteria and guidance manuals for AQEFA grant recipient schools and Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERCs) established and agreed</li> <li>Procurement of fund manager and transfer of funds to the fund manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First disbursements for AQEFA grants made to 32 schools and 3 IERCs (total funds disbursed: K221,490)</li> <li>School leadership and management training to 1,010 (F:304) teachers, school board members and government officers</li> <li>AQEFA training to 126 (F: 54) TICs, School Board of Governance Chairperson and a Board member</li> <li>Distribution of library boxes to 16 AQEFA schools</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 1</b> <b>Community engagement</b> - seeks to involve parents and the broader community in educational decisions and discussions by establishing parents and citizens (P&C) groups and implementing parent training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scoping and concept design for the school health and parenting program</li> <li>Procurement of sub-contractor (INGO) for program delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobilisation of sub-contractor for the School Health and Parenting Program [NB. This activity is paused pending recommendations from the review.]</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 1</b> <b>Back to School campaign</b> - aims to enhance parents' and communities' understanding of the importance of education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A back-to-school campaign ran in Q1, 2023, including print media, posters, stickers, social media, SMS/text blast, and local radio broadcast</li> <li>Distribution of school attendance books</li> <li>Follow up survey conducted of teachers, parents and students to understand which communication modalities were most effective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A back-to-school campaign including distribution of attendance books, radio messaging, content posted on the NDoE website and social media, ran at the beginning of the school year (January and February) and at the start of 2<sup>nd</sup> term</li> <li>A breakfast campaign ran in May and June to encourage parents and students to have a healthy, nutritious breakfast before school</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 1</b> <b>Other/GEDSI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution of attendance records to encourage tracking of attendance and retention of students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training for Inclusive Education Resource Centres (IERCs), including individual education plans and an Outreach Policy and guidance</li> <li>428 (F: 203) Prep to Grade 2 students screened (Sandaun)</li> <li>Eight trainers provided with master training and guidance to distribute, train and monitor use of classroom libraries and levelled readers</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 2</b> <b>Bilum Books + in-service training</b> - provides teachers with specialised resources and student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3,132 teachers received training in Bilum Books English</li> <li>252 teacher learning circles established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1087 teachers received training in Bilum Books English [4215 (F:2214) trained to date.]</li> <li>1 TLC Literacy refresher training</li> </ul>

Activity	2023 activity (Source: 2023 APR p.5, 9)	2024 (to June) activity (Source: 2024 SAR p.6, 7)
workbooks that align with curriculum standards, and training in the use of the resources.		conducted.
<b>EOIO 2</b> <b>Mathematics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and development of Mathematics Pedagogy Training materials (Trainers Guide, Participants Manual, student stencil book and TLC Guide)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early grade maths pedagogy training manual, teachers' manual, teacher learning circle guide, student stencil books and maths packs developed and prepositioned for maths in-service training planned for terms 3 and 4 2024</li> <li>3 x TOT for Math Pedagogy Trainers conducted (66 Trainers)</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 2</b> <b>Teacher Upgrading Fund (TUF)</b> - aims to upgrade or improve primary school teachers' knowledge of material, teaching techniques, and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Queensland University of Technology (QUT) contracted to co-design a diploma upgrading course and support delivery of quality training. The DWU Board approved the program specification document</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary diploma upgrading program, co-designed with 3 higher education institutes and the Queensland University of Technology, approved by Divine Word University's Governing Council and Academic Board; 6 of the 8 co-designed modules completed, 2 lecturer trainings completed</li> <li>Course modules on professional standards, child development, and citizen and Christian values incorporate gender equality</li> <li>Proposal and budget development for HEIs (PNGEI, Divine Word University and Enga Innovative University) to be subcontracted under the TUF to deliver the Diploma in Education (in-Service)</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 2</b> <b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher registration study examining barriers and enablers for male and female teachers finalised, presented to the NDoE Secretary and TMT. This study led to the review of the Education Act and reinforced the need for an integrated Teacher Information Management System (TIMS) and updated Education Management Information System (EMIS)</li> <li>Supported the Teacher Registration and Professional Development Division to draft the Teacher Professional Development Policy and results framework</li> <li>Home learning packs distributed to 32530 students in Enga.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First milestone for the integrated data management system to enable streamlining of teacher management completed following extensive consultation across the NDoE</li> <li>Teacher Professional Development Policy, implementation guidelines and results framework developed</li> <li>Representation at IFTRA in Brisbane, QLD and presentation on the Teacher Registration Study</li> <li>Home learning packs distributed to 1296 students (F:544) in Enga</li> </ul>

Activity	2023 activity (Source: 2023 APR p.5, 9)	2024 (to June) activity (Source: 2024 SAR p.6, 7)
<b>EOIO 3</b> <b>Improved school management</b> - aims to enhance governance within schools. This includes updating policies, frameworks, and procedures related to curriculum planning, inclusive education, disability support, GEDSI policies, and teacher codes of conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy, results framework and implementation guide developed for:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)</li> <li>Inclusive Education</li> <li>School learning and improvement plan (SLIP).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Established GEDSI Technical Working Group</li> <li>Support for review of the Central Province Education Act</li> <li>Support for review of the National Education Act</li> <li>PEIPs completed and delivered for Enga, Sandaun and Central</li> <li>School Inspections Division induction manual and training guide finalised and delivered to 255 inspectors across four PNG regions</li> <li>Facilitated distribution, collection, and entry of 1,441 early grade school census data forms (78% of early grade schools in PIE provinces)</li> <li>Digital skills training and resource assistance to improve data management and planning provided to 54 (F:9) PDoE and BDoE officers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy, results framework and implementation guide developed for:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School registration</li> <li>School health (v.0)</li> </ul> </li> <li>SLIP Policy, results framework and implementation guide approved by the Top Management Team and endorsed</li> <li>Digital skills training and resource assistance to improve data management and planning reached 114 (F:30) PDoE and BDoE officers</li> <li>School-based assessment survey conducted – report and data to inform National assessment and reporting policy</li> <li>Human resource data collection for 4 provinces</li> <li>Support for review of the Bougainville Education Act and broader legislative framework supporting the Bougainville Department of Education</li> <li>Following advice from PIE, NDoE have confirmed that the development of the Teaching Standards Framework will be gender-responsive and disability inclusive</li> </ul>
<b>EOIO 3</b> <b>MERLA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School level monitoring tool collects gender and disability data</li> <li>Subnational Institutional Capacity Assessment (SICA) gathers data on women's participation on school boards, to provide insights for initiatives aimed at promoting women's leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MERLA system collects sex-disaggregated data, and reports on gender equality outcomes (e.g. IO 1.1 and IO 1.2)</li> </ul>

## Current state challenges

This section highlights challenges that have and continue to confront the Program. These are in addition to the cost and resourcing challenges discussed earlier in Section 4. Some of the challenges are drawn from the *PIE 2024 Semi-annual performance report*, and some are drawn from the broader literature and experience on school system improvement. Key challenges (and discussion on responses) include:

- The *2024 Semi-annual performance report* (p.10) notes capacity and capability gaps in national and provincial divisions. Some gaps are because of unfilled or acting positions. As noted in the 2022 SICA (p.5), 'Across all areas, including strategic planning, inspections, teacher professional development, school leadership and management and monitoring and evaluation, there is plenty of scope and opportunity' to strengthen systems. PIE has responded to this through embedding personnel nationally and provincially who assist with, amongst other matters, the drafting of key education policies (and implementation support) and planning processes as well by undertaking and facilitating training programs. With a view to sustainability, there is merit in considering the broadening of national and provincial support to improve systems and build key position capability – see Section 7.

- Conflict and disruption in Enga

The August 2024 Exception Report on security matters in Enga notes that the ‘security situation in Enga Province remains highly unstable’ and that ‘Concerns around liability, program disruption and risk to persons and assets remain extremely high’.

- School system improvement, quality of teaching and student learning

CESE<sup>12</sup> (2014:3) citing Masters, observes that ‘*systemic and continuous improvement is ... acknowledged to be a complex process, requiring action over many domains. Many large initiatives for school improvement fail because they do not change day-to-day school practices, which are ‘recognised as remarkably impervious to, and self-protective against, fluctuating external policies and agendas’*’. CESE (2014:5) also notes that ‘*The international evidence indicates that school improvement is best measured with reference to both student outcomes and school practices or processes, rather than by focusing exclusively on one or the other. Raudenbush argues that no matter how sophisticated analysis of student outcome data is, there will always be limitations as to how much the data can tell us, claiming that “to be successful, accountability must be informed by other sources of information ... in particular, information on organizational and instructional practice”*’.

A strong feature of the PIE design and the MERLA strategy is the underlying theory of change and comprehensive results framework. Ideally, MERLA data on increasing enrolment, student retention, teacher participation in training and observation data on teacher practices will indicate that change is underway. However, the time for significant shifts in student learning (beyond some cases in individual schools) will most likely extend beyond the program’s first phase of 5 years. To be ready and confident to report on substantive shifts in teacher content and pedagogical knowledge, which would typically precede desired shifts in student learning, the program should (develop and) sustain a strong focus on measures of teaching quality (possibly linked to the proposed teacher competency framework).

## 6. Key review questions

### KRQ1 – Relevance

*To what extent does the PIE design (Theory of Change) and implementation approach still appear to be relevant at this point?*

The design and conduct of the PIE Program continue to be relevant in terms of alignment with Australia’s new Development Partnership Plan (DPP) 2024-2029<sup>13</sup> with PNG, GoPNG policies and priorities and with school system improvement research and practice.

- ✓ *The Program’s relevance is evident in its alignment with the new PNG Minister for Education’s priorities for education and the National Education Plan. Its relevance is also evident in the new Australia – Papua New Guinea DPP and learning from research into improving school systems.*

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) (2014) *School Improvement Frameworks: The Evidence Base*, NSW Department of Education, Sydney.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/australias-papua-new-guinea-development-partnership-plan-2024-2029>

- ✓ *Based on this alignment the program design continues to be relevant, however, it is important that the focus continue to be on ‘facilitating, testing, and monitoring innovative ways’ and ‘influencing policy and systems-based change’, rather than trying to achieve positive change for all, across every target province.*

#### Alignment with PNG priorities and plans

At the 14 August PIE-PASA Joint Coordinating Committee meeting Mr Kawage, NDoE Acting Deputy Secretary Policy and Corporate Services, reported on the Education Minister’s 5 policy directives, namely:

1. Children, prepare for learning.
2. Prepare teachers to teach.
3. School environment should be conducive to learning.
4. Focus on secondary education (FODE, TVET, NSOE)
5. School governance and leadership.

Participants at interviews for this independent progress review also referred to PIE’s alignment with the Minister’s policy directives and consistently reported that the Program’s activities were aligned with the National Education Plan and therefore their day-to-day workplans.

#### Alignment with Government of Australia policy settings

The *Australia – Papua New Guinea Development Partnership Plan (DPP) 2024-2029* (p.13) notes the mutual recognition of ‘foundational education in PNG as a key pathway to employment through secondary, technical and tertiary education’ and describes a boost in Australia’s investment in education in PNG, increasing the focus on ‘access, student retention and learning outcomes’.

PIE’s focus on improving foundational learning in the early years of schooling through its attention to access, retention and quality teaching for all students (girls, boys and children with disabilities) is aligned with the goals of the recent DPP, reinforcing the Program’s ongoing relevance.

#### Lessons from research

Mourshed et al<sup>14</sup> (2010:18) observed that ‘a school system can improve from any starting point’, and highlighted the importance of the system, when developing and implementing an improvement journey, identifying and acknowledging the starting point in terms of student outcomes and adopting a set of interventions that reflect the prevailing context. The study identified three intervention clusters adopted by systems in the ‘poor to fair’ range:

- Providing motivation and scaffolding for low skill teachers (e.g., scripted teaching materials, coaching on curriculum, school visits by the centre e.g. school inspectors)
- Getting all schools to a minimum quality level (e.g., provision of textbooks, school infrastructure improvements)
- Getting students in seats (e.g., expand school seats, fulfill students’ basic needs to raise attendance).

More recently the National Center on Education and the Economy<sup>15</sup> draws on its study of high performing school systems to present a blueprint for improvement that ‘can be accomplished across

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<sup>14</sup> Mourshed M, Chijioke C and Barber M (2010) *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*. McKinsey & Company, London.

<sup>15</sup> The National Center on Education and the Economy (2024) *NCEE Blueprint: Designing Systems That Work*. Washington, DC, National Center on Education and the Economy.

*the schooling experience of individual students. Systems can and do make real progress in five to eight years. Such systems work in aligned and coherent ways toward their goals.’ (NCEE 2024:3). The four strategies set out in the ‘blueprint’ are:*

- Prepare young people for long life learning.
- Cultivate high capacity, forward thinking educators.
- Join forces to ensure learners thrive.
- Think differently about system leadership.

These two reports bookend the education improvement journey that the GoPNG is seeking for its students, teachers and schools. The first provides reassurance on the strategies that the Government and the PIE program are adopting. The second also provides reassurance for the strategies being adopted along with encouragement and aspiration for medium to longer term goals and planning to guide the system.

These two reports, along with numerous others, provide encouragement and justification for the interventions being applied by PIE, from provision of scripted lessons, to coaching and support for teachers and school leaders, through to the system level support for the policy framework and data systems that will continue to guide system on its improvement journey.

#### Continuous improvement – program and system

The two reports also highlight the importance of schools and systems becoming learning organisations – learning from themselves and from others. They both reinforce the value of learning from others but constructing solutions that work for them. This feature is consistent with the intention in the PIE Inception Plan (p.5) – *‘Through facilitating, testing and monitoring innovative ways to address priority challenges related to access and retention, and the upgrading of skills of elementary teachers, the Program will seek to influence policy and systems-based change to improve learning outcomes for girls, boys and children with a disability in the early grades.’* As the Program continues it is important that it retains and promotes this approach to ‘system learning’, within and beyond the Program.

#### **KRQ 2 – Effectiveness**

*What progress has been observed in relation to the respective Intermediate and End of Program Outcomes? Which activities appear to be having a greater impact than others? Are there any activities which appear to have negligible to no impact to date, or not progressing as planned?*

At the 18-month implementation point considerable progress has been made in terms of the Program’s core activities and results designed to deliver the Program’s EOIOs. In a relatively short period of time the Program has made some notable achievements, including the Back-to-School campaigns in 2023 and 2024, the delivery of literacy training to teachers and support material for teachers and students, provision of home learning packs, and the necessary and welcome shift in policy development and approval.

Some activities have been delayed to varying degrees (against original timelines) e.g., school leadership and management training, disbursement of AQEFA grants. The planned parenting and health program is yet to commence due to challenges in outsourcing and the tighter budget situation.

While progress is evident, consistent with the Program’s theory of change, it is too early to expect improved learning outcomes to be evident. Given the challenge that exists in delivering, at scale, improvements in student learning the Program should consider whether its capacity to measure and report improvements in teaching quality is sufficient.

- ✓ *Significant benefits would accrue from the program more frequently and systematically collecting and reporting data (quantitative and qualitative) to illustrate progress (or not) in relation to the theory of change and using this to report progress and/or inform decision making on next steps.*
- ✓ *Given the timeline for the program and the inherent difficulty of moving the student learning dial, the program has a clear focus on the quality of teaching - a core driver for improved student learning. However, there is a need to sharpen the program's description and measure of the quality of teaching - because this is what needs to improve first, before learning outcomes shift.*

### Progress

Table 2 presents a high-level summary of program activity to June 2024. This summary of reporting to date indicates that considerable progress has been made in terms of the Program's core activities and inputs and project outputs. EOIOs are a key organiser of activities and discussion across Program documents, with discussion of progress against IOs appearing in the 2024 SAR.

Highlights from the 18-month summary include:

- Back to school campaigns
- Leadership and management training to 1,010 (F:304) teachers, school board members and government officers.
- Development of key policies and implementation guidance, providing clarity and guidance for school and teacher activities
- Bilum Books training for 4,215 teachers (and TLCs), compared with 900/year proposed in the IDD
- Progress with the Diploma upgrading course, teacher information management system.

At this point in the program's timeline, the reporting is typically activity based, with attention on outcomes related to improved retention, quality of teaching and improved learning (or indicators of these) yet to be seen – it is too soon to judge which activities are likely to have greater impact than others. In relation to the measure for 'teaching quality', the MERLA framework indicates "*# and % of P-G2 (early grade) teachers meeting minimum competency levels (National Teacher Competency Standards)*". In the absence of the competency standards the Program is working on an alternate indicator of teaching quality, possibly based on the PIE Lesson Observation schedule, which has been adapted from the World Bank 'Teach' observation tool.

This measure will be important so that data can inform judgements about the effectiveness of teacher training activities and/or provision of teaching and learning resources. Such judgements should consider the degree to which a round of teacher training followed by TLC activities has been effective or not. Rather than just conducting simple before and after surveys, assessment of teacher subject and pedagogical knowledge should occur at wider intervals e.g. 3 to 6 months if the data is to be used to judge effectiveness and inform decisions about whether refresher and consolidation activities are required or not. For example, after a round of Bilum Books training in 2023 the Program has planned to shift to mathematics training in 2024, with little or no assessment of the degree to which teaching quality in reading has improved and whether follow-up literacy instruction training is required.

### Program logic and causal links.

The PIE Program Logic is that systemic change that improves the delivery of early grades education (EOIO 3) will enable and be informed by interventions designed to improve student enrolment and retention (EOIO 1) and interventions designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning (EOIO 2).

The Program's Inception Plan (p.5) articulates the logic as '*Through facilitating, testing and monitoring innovative ways to address priority challenges related to access and retention, and the upgrading of skills of elementary teachers, the Program will seek to influence policy and systems-based change to improve learning outcomes for girls, boys and children with a disability in the early grades.*'

The 2024 MERLA Plan, adopts an 'ecological perspective', noting (p.11) that '*Children's learning outcomes are dependent on the support, capability and functionality of the people (family and teachers), institutions (schools, IERCs, TTIs etc) and systems (government departments, policies) identified in these rings. PIE program interventions aim to strengthen each layer of the ecological model to improve learning outcomes for early grade students.*'

The MERLA Plan represents this by EOIO:

- EOIO 1 interventions will improve children's ability to learn by: supporting their health and nutrition; supporting children with disability, addressing gender inequalities; increase families' support for early grade education; improve school leadership and management; and strengthen relationships between the school and the community and other relevant stakeholders to support delivery of quality education and learning environments.
- EOIO 2 interventions will improve the quality of the early grade teacher workforce, the teacher training institutions, and provincial government structures and systems that coordinate, monitor and support delivery of education.
- EOIO 3 interventions will strengthen government systems and the policy environment.

Further, the 2024 MERLA Plan provides discussion on the theory of change for each EOIO, from inputs to outputs to IOs and EOIOs and sets these in an 'ecological framework' (p.11). This is consistent with international discussion on ecosystemic perspectives on improving school systems occurring. The Program's ability to monitor the range of activities and factor the degree to which they contribute improvements in attendance, engagement, teaching quality and, ultimately, student learning will be important to this Program and the contribution it can make to informing future investments – nationally and by international partners.

### **KRQ 3 – Efficiency**

*To what extent is PIE implementation demonstrating value for money and providing an understanding of the cost of doing business in elementary/primary education in PNG in selected provinces?*

As the program has moved from design to inception and to implementation there has been significant learning about the cost of doing business in PNG and the four locations.

A CBA analysis, based on modelling results from similar programs, budgeted costs and target gains, concludes that PIE is a sound value for money investment. The Program has consistently sought to keep costs down, using resources as efficiently as possible. PIE has also benefited from the Shared Services arrangement with the Managing Contractor.

Data collection and reflection is a positive feature of the PIE program operation, however, based on experience and learning to date there appear to be some opportunities to refine data collection and reflection processes to enhance program learning.

- ✓ *The Program clearly seeks to build on its own research and learning (and from other programs); however, more strategic use of piloting and phasing of activities could enhance program learning and strengthen demonstration of value for money.*
- ✓ *The strategic focus and oversight of the program would be improved via a regular external strategic monitoring and advisory function (as initially proposed) and more systematic engagement of DFAT / AHC personnel in key review / reflection activities. Increased DFAT/AHC involvement in strategic discussions could also strengthen their ability to engage in policy dialogue on key issues at high levels.*

#### Value for money (cost benefit)

The CBA report considered six of PIE's interventions - Bilum Books (resources and teacher training), community engagement, back to school campaign, teacher upgrading fund, school leadership and management, and AQEFA fund. The study used the budgeted costs of these activities to estimate the value of the benefits under two scenarios:

- i. the targets set in PIE's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Learning, and Adapting Framework (MERLAF)
- ii. the potential benefits based on evidence from secondary literature, which were more optimistic than the Program targets.

The CBA observed that the PIE interventions would deliver a Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of ten, meaning that every dollar spent would generate ten dollars in benefits. Overall, the study concluded that PIE is a sound investment, providing a 'positive assessment of the interventions, with benefits exceeding costs under both optimistic and conservative scenarios' (p.6).

While this conclusion is encouraging the CBA report noted some limitations, including one related to the longevity of training benefits and another related to intensity (or dosage) of the interventions. Limitations were also noted by personnel reading the report. These include that the financial data used in the analysis was DFAT budget estimates rather than actual Program costs (or costs that would be incurred by the GoPNG), and that outcomes were estimated for separate components and added together (which might be an overestimation of overall impact). Some of the evidence from secondary literature was not necessarily a like for like comparison in terms of key features, dosage, inputs.

#### Cost of doing business

As the program has moved from design to inception and to implementation there has been significant learning about the cost of doing business in PNG and the four locations. Data collection and reflection is a positive feature of the PIE program operation.

Earlier discussion (Section 4) provided examples of actual cost increases and instances of additional, unplanned costs arising from the need to redo training to better build on current levels of participant knowledge and skill.

Discussion on 'effectiveness in the preceding section proposed the need for greater attention being paid to the sequencing and timing of interventions or adaptations, to ensure the program logic is applied as efficiently (and effectively) as possible. This might include a process of option or scenario testing to ensure the 'best' response is adopted, with a focus on effectiveness, efficiency and

sustainability. It should not be assumed by DFAT or GoPNG, that PIE has the funding to roll out all interventions equally across target provinces. Rather its focus should be on investing in evidence-based demonstration models that GoPNG, potentially with the support of other development partners, can take to scale.

Such learning will continue. With greater understanding of the national and provincial contexts, including strengths and specific development needs, combined with data collected through this program, the efficiency of medium- and longer-term planning and implementation processes should improve. This will be enhanced through the incorporation of additional ‘independent’ oversight and guidance – such as the strategic monitoring and advisory function set out in earlier program plans and through more systematic engagement of AHC personnel.

#### **KRQ 4 – Sustainability**

*At this point in the program are there any interventions that appear more likely than others of being sustained beyond the PIE project cycle? Why might this be so and are there any thoughts on what would be required to increase sustainability and replicability? Which interventions appear to be greatest value for money at this point in the program?*

The conduct of the Bilum Books workshops and follow-up teacher learning circles appear to have created desire amongst teachers for further teacher in-service training, resources and support which provides opportunity for professional engagement within and beyond schools. Further structured and regular in-service training events as well as the PIE TUF activity can be expected to build the momentum.

The Program has also made a significant contribution to the development of key policy documents that provide clarity about expectations in areas such as Teacher Development, GESI, Inclusive Education and School learning and improvement plans. Clarity about such areas provide a platform for further planning and implementation provincially and nationally.

Further support for development and implementation of such enabling activities, and a sharp focus across all Program activities will be important for momentum to be sustained and to maximise chances of success.

Continuing to support successful models of in-service training, including through budget planning and allocation, has the potential to encourage provincial and national departments to take steps to (re)introduce (quality) NIST and PIST programs.

#### A (greater) focus on sustainability

The program has made significant commitments to sustainability, planning to adopt an approach that “PIE will take towards sustaining key changes, results and approaches/models beyond the life of the program”. Sustainability is intended to be integrated into “regular planning, implementation and review cycles to support the PIE team to embed sustainability throughout the program” (Sustainability Strategy, p.1).

Further, the sustainability plan (p.3) promotes regular review with three key criterion – performance to date; strategic importance to PIE; strategic importance to GoPNG. While these intentions are clear, the focus on sustainability is not evident in routine monitoring and reflection processes to date – which is quite understandable given the attention and effort focused on building foundations and momentum nationally and provincially. However, this strategic dimension of regular reflection activities could be added to an enhanced strategic oversight and guidance function as discussed in the preceding section of efficiency.

### Building relevance and ownership

As noted in the Political Economy Analysis (p.7) and reflected in EOIOs 1 and 2, the core PIE strategies centre on technical activities designed to respond to address ‘deficits in the school system’. However, the PEA (p.8) encourages consideration of what is politically possible and how stakeholders see the aims of the education system.

In addition, the PEA observes (p.29) that the embedded staff (NDoE and PDoE) play a key role in national and provincial personnel ‘taking ownership’ of the activities and interventions. It encourages consideration of how the Program can gain more from embedded staff and how they can be better supported (see Reco 4, p.33). The focus on NDoE and PDoE ownership should be increasingly reflected in conversations regarding expanding to additional provinces, including co-contributions related to key personnel and funding. AHC/DFAT policy dialogue with high level officials should also reflect this messaging.

Examples of improved relevance, understanding and ownership can be found in monitoring visit data collections and reports. An interview with a school board chair and the school principal (20 August) highlighted the benefit of SLIP training provided by PIE. Both demonstrated a sound and practical understanding of the SLIP, including their respective roles and responsibilities and it was apparent that benefits were likely to accrue for the school and the students. (While just one case) it is a positive example of a technical intervention improving the foundations of a school’s operation that can be expected to contribute to sustainability.

The 2024 SAR (p.19) cites evidence of increasing desire for replication, noting that ‘*Enga and Sandaun Province Provincial Education Advisers have expressed interest in rolling-out the school leadership and management training to all school levels after seeing the quality of the training package developed by ChildFund for PIE*’. Further Mr Kawage, Acting Deputy Secretary Policy and Corporate Services, in an interview for this review on 19 August, said that he was ‘keen to apply PIE to roll out to other provinces’. Similarly, Mr Ainui, Acting Deputy Secretary, Standards and Curriculum, on 22 August, expressed his ‘strong commitment to learn from PIE and to take ownership to run with the rest of the provinces’.

As the Program continues its work to investigate and prove successful interventions that are sustainable and replicable it might need to differentiate what is replicable, possibly with the aid of other partners and what can be owned and sustainable, in the context of current resourcing, by the national and provincial governments. A key element in sustaining gains realised through PIE in the medium- and longer-term is likely to be the reinvigoration and strengthening of in-service systems, nationally and provincially, that set expectations for and support continuous professional development. The PIE TUF will contribute to the reinstatement of ‘in-service training (IST) practice’ (National, and Provincial In-Service Training) that was referred to in interviews with PNG teachers and personnel for this review.

### Medium- and long-term perspectives

- ✓ *Use of a longer-term vision (plan) for early years learning improvement in PNG (i.e. beyond the life of the current program) would contribute to a sharpened focus on sustainability through reflection on and influencing of program planning and activities, and engagement with partners.*

While the PIE program was originally envisaged as an eight-year initiative, a focus on sustainability can be strengthened through attention to what has come before, and what will follow. For example, PIE reporting on ARoB, and Central acknowledges that some teachers in those provinces have already benefited from literacy training – so the 2023 Bilum Books training will likely have built on and reinforced prior learning in those provinces, whereas such training in Sandaun may actually be a first for most teachers. Adopting (and modelling) a strength-based approach and building on current levels of capability and resources will contribute to the likelihood of sustainability.

In this context the Program should continue to advise the NDoE and PDoEs to develop and implement activities in the short term, with a view to longer term impact and requirements, including their responsibility and accountability to sustain and build on these activities.

#### **KRQ 5 – Monitoring and Evaluation**

*To what extent is the M&E system providing useful information in relation to the program IOs and EOPOs and for this progress review? To what extent does the M&E system appear to be appropriate for informing DFAT considerations for future investments / PIE phases?*

The M&E system is judged to be appropriate for reporting against the PIE IOs and EOIOs and has provided useful information for this review. The current M&E system would usefully inform DFAT on the effectiveness of the program and discussion about future phases.

However, there is value in streamlining the system and improving some elements, particularly the capacity to measure and report in teaching quality.

- ✓ *Strengthened L and A elements of the MERLA strategy could be combined with enhanced capacity and quality of communication activities and products, to showcase best practice and influence PNG education policy and practice.*
- ✓ *There is merit in the program strengthening in-progress assessment of effectiveness, in relation to teacher quality and improved student learning, to contribute to continuous program monitoring and to inform the need for and nature of any program adaptations.*

#### Review of PIE MES

A separate review was conducted for PIE's Monitoring and Evaluation System (PIE MES).

Key observations and findings from the Draft PIE MES Review are:

- In the context of foundational learning and education program MEL systems in general, PIE's MES system design and implementation reflects a program team that is committed to measuring effectiveness, learning from implementation experiences, and willing to be held accountable for outcomes.
- Of the nine elements assessed for the appraisal, 4 elements were met, 2 were mostly met, 3 were partially met, and 0 were not met. Detailed discussion on these elements and what can be done to strengthen the MEL system is included in the review report.
- In general, the scope of the MEL system is judged to be appropriate for reporting against the PIE IOs and EOIOs. The review also provided advice on how the baseline literacy and numeracy assessments and surveys might be improved and observed a need to enhance the indicators associated with EOIO 3. The review also commented that the current MEL system is complex and has many components and that the system should be reviewed to identify rationalisation / streamlining opportunities.

- The review judged that some adjustments should be made to the overall design and specific instruments, with detailed comments provided in the report, for consideration by the project team.
- The current MEL system can adequately inform DFAT as to whether their program has been effective (if improvements in measurement are put into place), which is critical for DFAT's consideration of future phases. That said, the current MEL system does not include a strong lens on sustainability or systems integration, which is especially important for future DFAT investment strategies.

The report and recommendations of the PIE MES Review should be read in conjunction with the PIE response. The response, amongst others matters:

- Provides explanations for decisions taken in the design, conduct and reporting of the baseline assessment for which the PIE MES reviewers raised concerns or posed questions.
- Observes that the PIE MES review was conducted remotely, with little or no engagement with PIE personnel and with some apparent lack of recognition of the PNG context, limiting the veracity of some observations and recommendations.

While some observations and recommendations made in the PIE MES Review might be discounted, overall, the detailed discussion provides a useful reference point for reflection on the PIE MERLA Framework. The PIE response to the review report includes such reflection, along with acceptance of advice, and responses to observations and recommendations that were not accepted.

Based on feedback and observations made during the Independent Progress Review consideration might be given to:

- Confirming the actual current resources dedicated to MERLA activities noting, for example, that the provincial MERLA positions have other roles and responsibilities beyond MERLA and judging whether the dedicated MERLA resource is adequate for the task.
- Strengthening and streamlining MERLA contributions to regular annual or more frequent review and reflection activities (see sustainability plan, partnerships plan etc), provincially and nationally.
- Better use of qualitative data to inform discussion about progress or barriers e.g. 'green shoots' and 'orange flags'.
- Strengthening the Learning and Adaptation components of the MERLA Strategy, building on products such as the 'stories of change' in the 2024 SAR (Annex F), to increase the Program's collateral and capacity for public diplomacy and policy influence. A greater focus on public diplomacy and policy influence will contribute to the parent and community engagement element of the program as well as the policy influence element through showcasing good news stories to senior officials and Ministers.

## 7. Discussion on next steps

Drawing on preceding sections on Program context and the 5 Key Review Questions, the discussion in this section considers 'what (might be) next?', with the intention of informing DFAT discussion and decisions about changes to the elements and operation of the program. To ensure the context and operational challenges unique to PNG are adequately considered, including in relation to budget

allocation, these topics should be discussed further with the PIE team, before next steps are confirmed.

The discussion is grouped under eight topics:

- Program resourcing
- Guiding principles / ways of working
- Strategic oversight and guidance
- Program activity stock-take (and adjustment)
- Refine the MERLA framework and strengthen strategic communication
- Adjust provincial engagement
- Geographic expansion

#### Program resourcing.

Given the context within which the Program is operating and the actual data on the cost of doing business discussed in section 5, there is a strong rationale for bringing forward the Phase 2 budget allocation to the current phase, so that AUD75m is available for Phase 1. This will avoid having to scale down Phase 1 implementation in years 4 and 5. It will also support the consolidation of investments to date, particularly those related to literacy training, which require ongoing investment to ensure that teaching practices change in the short term and maximise the chance that student learning will improve in the medium and longer term.

#### Guiding principles / ways of working.

The PEA (p.31) proposes a set of ‘principles of practice’. As it has worked through a range of issues related to security and safety in relation to Enga, seeking to test and prove what works, desire for equitable opportunity, building capacity and promoting sustainability, the Program has made decisions about adapting to changing circumstances. There may be value in the Program reflecting on the ‘best ways of working’ to build on progress to date and guide future planning and investments. For example:

- Focus on proving what works rather than ensuring equal opportunity for all.
- Work to build understanding and ownership by PNG.
- Minimise risk – for personnel safety; and to the achievement of program goals.
- Continuous learning ... reflect, consolidate, and learn some more.
- Apply a strengths-based approach to all activities and when interpreting data and reports.

#### Strategic oversight and guidance.

Introduce a regular external strategic monitoring and advisory function (as initially proposed in the IDD), along with more systematic engagement of DFAT / AHC personnel in key review / reflection activities. Such a function might have been used to reflect on the plan to switch, in Year 2, to mathematics training in each province rather than consolidating or extending literacy training in some (or all) provinces.

Develop a high-level longer-term vision for learning improvement in PNG to guide reflection on program planning and activities, engagement with partners and future planning.

### Program activity stock-take (and adjustment).

Taking account of the progress to date and current program successes and challenges, undertake a program activity stock-take to decide on appropriate adjustments to program activities to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. This might include (but not be limited to):

- reviewing the relevance and value of Program IOs and consider streamlining, adding or amending the current set
- taking stock of the current set of activities and consider cessation, adaptation or addition to improve effectiveness and efficiency
- articulating key pedagogical / instructional practices that should be common to all teacher training activities i.e. across literacy and adjust the design to ensure that this happens
- designing additional literacy learning activities and implementation strategies to consolidate, build on, and extend literacy learning
- where literacy learning (subject and pedagogical knowledge) has been well established considering implementation of mathematics training, possibly in one province only to gain feedback and adjust the resource before further implementation
- reflecting on the implied or actual sequencing of program activities that contribute to building national, provincial and school leadership, management and governance capacity; identify foundational learning and next step learning needs to enhance educational leadership
- (meeting with ChildFund) to gain feedback on current leadership and management training and designing opportunities to build on current learning
- investigating how knowledge from embedded staff can be more strategically shared and applied, particularly in relation to building ownership and sustainability (See PEA discussion and Reco 4, p.33).

### Refine the MERLA framework and strengthen strategic communications.

Draw on the PIE MES Review and experience to date to refine the MERLA strategy and framework where appropriate, including but not limited to:

- rationalise / streamline the framework with a goal of more frequent review and reflection activities on program progress and success
- review and enhance instruments (minding implications for base-, mid- and endline use)
- strengthen capacity to assess the quality of teaching and improvement over time
- incorporate the use of qualitative data to inform discussion about progress or barriers e.g. 'green shoots' and 'orange flags'
- strengthen L and A functions, building on products such as the 'stories of change' in the 2024 SAR (Annex F), to increase the Program's collateral and capacity for public diplomacy and policy influence
- review the CBA model to see if it is consistent with the PIE Program Logic (and theory of change) and determine which data can be collected for incorporation into the model; and decide whether this is an exercise that PIE staff could continue with at key points in time, given the model is already built
- ensure that there's a capacity to measure and analyse activity inputs and outputs and analyse the relative contributions of these towards increase student attendance and engagement, improved teaching quality and improved student learning (See MERLA 2024 discussion (p.24) on causal links.

### Adjust current provincial engagement.

The *Partnerships for Improving Education Baseline Study* (p.21) observes that '*Whilst in agreement with the ToC, each of the four participating subnational locations have distinctive areas of concern that will need PIE's attention. PIE will need to prioritise certain strategies in the approach, depending on the subnational context.*'

The Baseline Study (pp.15-20) observes that there is variation across the provinces in terms of access to and participation in ECE; student attendance; teacher engagement with previous programs e.g. PPF; teacher participation in professional learning. [The subnational snapshots provided in the baseline should be replicated in any engagement with other provinces and should inform the starting point for Program activities.]

By design, the Program developed a series of interventions that would apply in all districts in each of the four locations. Eighteen months in there is variation in the engagement and the need for next steps. Consistent with the Baseline Study observation there is merit in reviewing progress to date and prioritising next steps in each of the four locations, from limited engagement with Enga through to more advanced engagement in ARoB.

Possible activities	Enga	Sandaun	ARoB	Central
Back to school campaign	x	Y	Y	Y
School leadership and management	x	Y	Y	Y
AQEFA	x	Y	Y	Y
TUF	Y	Y	Y	Y
BB training and resources	x	As needed	As needed	As needed
Consolidate (reinforce or remediate) literacy learning from BB training, possibly linked to PIST	x	Y	Y	Y
Extend literacy training, possibly linked to PIST or NIST	x	?	Y	?
Numeracy training, possibly linked to PIST or NIST	x	x	?	x
Parenting and health program as a pilot program in one Province	x	x	?	?
PDoE training – leadership and management of key provincial personnel	Y	Y	Y	Y

### Geographic expansion

Based on current progress and PIE's current resourcing profile it is not recommended that PIE expands immediately to a 5th province.

Based on the original intent of PIE, messaging around expansion needs to be reframed in a way that sees National and Provincial government driving the expansion, taking on proven PIE models rather than an expectation that PIE might, overtime, cover every province.

Increased government leadership and ownership may take the form of commitment to staffing key positions (e.g., provincial trainers, literacy advisors), making acting positions substantive, co-contributions, strategic use of PSIP etc. In addition to provincial commitments consideration should be given to possible national government commitments (e.g., engagement and training of inspectors, development of literacy and numeracy resources etc).

However, planning for entry into additional province(s) should commence with the design of a process (possibly building on the Baseline Study approach) to assess strengths and development needs with a

focus on identifying and building on current capacity. The study should include but not be limited to student participation and attainment factors, school leadership, management and planning (including community engagement and school Board operation), provincial leadership and management (including technical expertise and budgeting and planning capacities). The development of a baseline profile would be the starting point for engagement with a new province, which would also include the opportunity for the province to set its priorities (within a suite of program activities and experience).

At the earliest, after the design and preparatory work discussed in the previous paragraph and some planning and negotiation with the GoPNG, a baseline could commence in a new province(s) in 12 months' time (Oct 2025) to line up with the current PIE mid-line, providing some organisational efficiencies.

Further discussion with the World Bank on potential IDA funds, should focus on how the injection of literacy (and numeracy) teacher training, and teaching and learning resources, can provide the jump-start to improving foundational learning in all PNG Provinces. Such funds would seek to replicate proven PIE models within on ongoing DFAT (PIE) framework focused on building capacity and sustainability of the provincial and national elements of the system.

Ultimately the goal will be for the GoPNG to take the lead on sustaining the necessary reforms and new approaches at the provincial level, there will be an ongoing role for PIE like support, mentoring and relationship brokering in existing and new provinces for many years to come.

## 8. Recommendations

- I. Program resourcing - Bring forward the Phase 2 budget allocation to the current phase, so that AUD75m is available for the remaining years of Phase 1.  
[Ref. discussion in Context (pp.7-10), KRQ 1 (p.16), KRQ 2 (p.18), KRQ 3 (pp.19-20), KRQ 4 (p.21), KRQ 5 (p.23) and Discussion on next steps (p.24).]
- II. Strategic oversight and governance - Introduce a regular external strategic monitoring and advisory function.  
[Ref. discussion in Context (pp.13-14), KRQ 1 (p.15), KRQ 2 (p.18), KRQ 3 (p.19), KRQ 4 (pp. 21-22), KRQ 5 (p.23) and Discussion on next steps (p.25).]
- III. Program activity stock-take (and adjustment) - Undertake a program activity stock-take to decide on appropriate adjustments to program activities to improve effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.  
[Ref. discussion in Context (p.13), KRQ 2 (p.18), KRQ 3 (p.20), KRQ 4 (p.21) and Discussion on next steps (p.25).]
- IV. Refine the MERLA framework - Draw on the PIE MES Review and experience to date to refine the MERLA strategy and framework.  
[Ref. discussion in KRQ 2 (p.18), KRQ 3 (p.20), KRQ 4 (p.), KRQ 5 (p.21) and Discussion on next steps (p.25).]
- V. Strengthen strategic communication - Increase the Program's collateral and capacity for public diplomacy and policy influence.  
[Ref. discussion in KRQ 1 (pp.15-16), KRQ 4 (pp.21-22), KRQ 5 (p.23) and Discussion on next steps (p.25).]
- VI. Adjust current provincial engagement - Review progress to date and prioritise next steps in each of the four locations to account for local context and priorities, and progress and learning to date.  
[Ref. discussion in Context (p.14), KRQ 2 (p.18), KRQ 3 (p.20), KRQ 4 (pp.21-22) and Discussion on next steps (p.26).]
- VII. Geographic expansion – PIE should not proceed to a 5th province in the short term. Rather expansion to other provinces should be driven by GoPNG, with PIE support, informed by a longer-term plan for expansion and consultation with other partners, including the World Bank.  
[Ref. discussion in KRQ 1 (p.16), KRQ 4 (p.20), KRQ 5 (p.23) and Discussion on next steps (p.27).]

## 9. Annex

### Documents read prior to in-country visit

Group	Document name
PIE Contract	77441_Contract_PIE_.docx
PIE Design	Final PIE IDD with program logic in image form- Vol 1 Narrative 30072021 Appendix G-Budget 30072021 Clean PIE IDD - Vol 2 Appendices bm edits 30072021
PIE MERLA Framework	2404 PIE MERLA Framework - External 2April24 PIE MERLA Plan 2024 2312 PIE Indicator Definitions – 2024 PIE MERLA Plan 2023 v1 PIE MERLA Framework 2023 PIE MERLA Framework clean 1Apr23 230411 Assessment Partnership for Improving Education M&E STANDARD 5
Reports – AR and SAR	2023 Annual Performance Report 2023 APR Annexes PIE APR Annexes Jan 23 - Dec 23 PIE Semi-Annual Report January 2023 to June 2023 Abt PIE SAR Reporting Annexes Jan 23 - Jun 23 2024 SAR 2024 SAR Annexes 31.07.24 PIE 6MR Annexes Jan 24 - June 24
PIE Program Strategies	PIE GEDSI Strategy 2024 Final Partnerships for Improving Education Localisation Strategy v6 PIE Sustainability Strategy October 22
PASA	20221011 Education PASA Aide Memoire 20230406 Aide Memoire - Education PASA Mission -February 2023 Aide Memoire - Education PASA_April 24 to April 28 2023
Workplans	PIE Inception Plan 29.08.2022 PIE 2023 Annual Workplan Resubmission 2024 Annual Work Plan 2024 AWP Annexes 1A - 4A PIE Annual Workplan 2024-2025 PIE Plan to Accelerate Impact - Combined Strategy Document
Baseline data	PNP011_BASELINE_V15_LR 20221118_PIE SICA Report_v3
Other	Exception Report on Save the Children Contract 2024 PEA PIE Report_v8

## Interviews and meetings – remote and in-country

When	Who	Mode
1 August	CBA Report discussion – Limestone Analytics - Limestone Analytics; HDMES	Teams
9 August	PIE Finance	Teams
9 August	PIE Merla Team	Teams
12 August	Abt	Teams
13 August	PIE Sub-national managers	Teams
13 August	PIE National Technical Adviser	Teams
14 August	Bilum Books	Teams
14 August	PIE GEDSI Safeguarding Team	Teams
16 August	World Bank PASA	Teams
19 August	AHC Port Moresby	In-person
19 August	PIE Finance	In-person
19 August	JMV to Vanapa Briefing	In-person
19 August	PIE Merla Team	In-person
19 August	MEL Review Discussion	Teams
20 August	Vapana School Visit – class observation; discussion with School Principal and School Board Members - Discussion with NDOE Personnel - Debrief session with JMV team	In-person
20 August	Niupay	Teams
21 August	Abt	Teams
21 August	NDoE	In-person
21 August	University of PNG – ANU Policy Update – ‘Teachers and the education sector’	In-person
22 August	NDoE	In-person
22 August	NDoE and TSC personnel	In-person
22 August	NDoE	In-person
23 August	NDoE	In-person
23 August	ChildFund	Teams
28 August	Divine Word University	Teams