
EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAM 2 BASIC EDUCATION COMPONENT INDEPENDENT MID-TERM REVIEW

Prepared for
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Australian High Commission

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this mid-term review report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Solomon Islands or the Australian Government.

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Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AHC | Australian High Commission |
| AJR | Annual Joint Review |
| AWP | Annual Work Plan |
| BEC | Basic Education Component |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| DFA | Direct Funding Agreement |
| EA | Education Authority |
| EQAP | Educational Quality and Assessment Program |
| EGRA | Early Grade Reading Assessment |
| EMIS | Educational Management Information System |
| ESA | Education Sector Advisor |
| ESMA | Education Sector Management Advisor |
| ESP | Education Sector Program |
| FFM | Fellowship of Faithful Mentors |
| GPI | Gender Parity Index |
| LEAP | Leadership and Education Authority Programme |
| LoV | Letter of Variation |
| LPMU | Literacy Programme Management Unit |
| MDPAC | Ministry of Development Planning and Co-operation |
| MEHRD | Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development |
| MFAT | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand) |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MTR | Mid-Term Review |
| NEAP | National Education Action Plan |
| NEB | National Education Board |
| NER | Net Enrolment Ration |
| NDS | National Development Strategy |
| NZAID | New Zealand Agency of International Aid |
| NZHC | New Zealand High Commission |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OTL | Opportunity to Learn |
| PIC | Pacific Island Country |
| PEA | Provincial Education Authority |
| PEAP | Provincial Education Authority Plan |
| PFM | Public Financial Management |
| RAMSI | Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands |
| RTC | Rural Training Centre |
| SIEMIS | Solomon Islands Education Management Information System |
| SIG | Solomon Islands Government |
| SINTA | Solomon Islands National Teachers Association |
| SISTA | Solomon Islands Standardised Test of Achievement |
| SLM | School Leadership Mentors |
| SSEC | South Seas Evangelical Church |
| SSU | Strategic Support Unit |
| SWAp | Sector Wide Approach |

| | |
|--------|--|
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UNEVOC | International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| USP | University of the South Pacific |
| WB | World Bank |

Executive Summary

This document contains findings from an independent mid-term review (MTR) of Components A and D of the Education Sector Program 2 (ESP 2) which are jointly referred to as ESP 2 Basic Education Component (BEC – the Program), commissioned by the Government of Australia through its Education Program in its High Commission in Honiara, Solomon Islands. According to the original ToRs (see Annex A), it forms Phase 2 of work commissioned in this area. Phase 1 consisted of a Public Financial Management (PFM) and Procurement Assessment which was completed prior to the work described in this document.

ESP2 BEC has the following end of program outcomes:

1. More children complete basic education regardless of socio-economic status, location, gender or disability;
2. Children in basic education achieve improved learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy; and
3. Resources are managed more efficiently and effectively according to a coherent strategic plan and budget.

The original program design was planned for an eight-year timeframe from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2022 with the aim of “consolidating progress in system development from the past investments to deliver measurable results on the ground” (DFAT and MEHRD, 2014 p.vi)¹. The program was designed to be delivered in two phases with phase 1 ending on 31st December 2018 with measurable progress towards End of Program Outcomes expected by this date. The original design specified End of Program Outcomes, Intermediate Outcomes as well as Program Outcomes which were intended to be achieved by 2022. The Direct Funding Agreement (DFA)² states that the end of the program should be 30 June 2019. The timing of the MTR therefore provides an ideal opportunity to inform a more complete redesign of the program to commence in July 2019 to respond to changes in the educational and broader context.

The MTR took place in July-September 2018 and consisted of an extensive document review and an in-country trip to Solomon Islands from 26 July to 10 August 2018. This included school visits in Rennell-Bellona and Western Provinces and Honiara. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were held with selected Provincial and Church Education Authorities, Head-Teachers, Teachers, School communities, Parents and Students. The MTR team also met with Solomon Islands Government representatives from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), the Prime Minister’s Office and Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination (MDPAC). Development Partners and NGOs were also interviewed.

¹ Investment Design: Solomon Islands Education Sector Program 2: Final December 2014

² Direct Funding Agreement between the Government of Australia as represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Solomon Islands Government as represented by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and the Ministry of Finance and Treasury in relation to Solomon Islands Education Sector Program 2 (DFAT agreement reference number 7147)

The questions for the mid-term review covered all aspects of ESP 2 BEC but within this report have been organized under seven key areas, some of which mirror the DAC criteria. Questions which were of key interest to AHC were highlighted for the team and, where possible, the report includes greater detail in these areas.

It is anticipated that the end users of the review will be MEHRD and in particular the Senior Management Team, AHC Honiara and other Development Partners engaged in the sector e.g. the NZHC.

Findings and Key Recommendations

In looking at the key areas the review team found that:

1. The review found that the program is still **highly relevant** and in line with both Australian and Solomon Island government priorities as well as needs in the sector. It is also relevant to needs on the ground and is helping expand access to, and the quality of, basic education
2. Program achievement in terms of **effectiveness and end results** is moving positively towards the intermediate and End of Program outcomes with increase in quality and access, although some interventions and activities from the original design have not taken place. Under strong leadership in MEHRD and with the support of the SSU, procedures and processes have been strengthened at central level and there is evidence of the program's reach achieved through teacher and school leader professional development, infrastructure, curriculum and resources. . There was recognition of Australia's contribution from interviews and site visits with communities speaking positively about Australian support. The recognition was in part due to the fact that donors funded grants in the past, but also that the curriculum innovations are reaching school level, materials are in schools and that teachers are receiving on-the-job support as a result of interventions by the program. However, certain aspects of the program are functioning less well particularly in the area of PFM. There has been a significant underspend although this may be due in large part to the fact that MEHRD systems are much stronger in relation to SIG PFM and procurement rules, resulting in clampdown in a number of areas including imprests. The copyright for school materials remains problematic and the platform for SIEMIS may not necessarily represent best value for money.
3. In terms of **efficiency**, the program has been successful in achieving the bulk of its planned outputs and activities within budget. However, reporting requirements related to TAs have occasionally been unclear and the majority of program TA has been in the areas of system strengthening including PFM and procurement rather than to support downstream work.
4. In terms of the **delivery modality** of budget support, the team found that it represents best practice, is generally effective in strengthening systems and supporting service delivery. The AHC has ensured that sufficient precautions are in place to ensure the safeguarding of funds.
5. The program is making some inroads in terms of **cross-cutting** issues although where these involve attitudinal changes, sustained interventions are needed.

Taking into account the overall findings the team recommends that the program should be maintained or expanded especially as the original intention was for it to continue until 2022 to ensure that the very positive gains made under the program are sustained and built on. There are a

number of recommendations which can be made as a result of the findings from the review as follows:

Recommendation 1

The current delivery approach which includes direct budget support and parallel support should continue into the next phase of the program. MEHRD should be helped with spend through: 1) provision of TA specific to capacity building in procurement and PFM, 2) outsourcing where possible and increased use of larger contracts 3) provision of a clear, easy to use operating manual for MEHRD staff on procurement and PFM processes.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that the system of budget support is aligned with best practice. It represents the only practicable way of reaching all schools in the country and means that despite only contributing 5% of the budget, Australia is better positioned to enter into dialogue with SIG. Our findings show that the current process contains sufficient safeguards to Australian investment in the sector.

Recommendation 2

Linked to the above recommendation, partners should continue with current PFM and Procurement Advisers and consider supplementing these with an advisor/s whose sole purpose is to strengthen capacity in a facilitative rather than compliance role. In the future, advisors should also work closely with corporate services to help develop the appropriate sections of its planned standard operating manual so that the procedures contained in the manual are clearly understood and owned by MEHRD staff.

Our recommendations are based on reported difficulties in understanding some financial and procurement procedures. While TA in Finance and Procurement are assisting MEHRD to monitor and manage fiduciary risk, the emphasis on helping staff with spend could be strengthened.

Recommendation 3

AHC maintains its use of parallel support mechanisms into the next phase and considers expanding support through this modality to high poverty regions (Honiara, Makira, Guadalcanal) identified in the 2012 – 2013 Household Income and Expenditure Survey as areas of greatest vulnerability and poverty.

Our recommendations are based on findings that the modality of sub-contracting e.g. to companies has worked well in areas such as curriculum. Information from both interview respondents as well as broader document analysis also appears to indicate that this modality is suitable to pilots which can then later be expanded to other provinces.

Recommendation 4

MEHRD should continue with its outsourcing especially in the area of larger contracts and pilots.

Our recommendations are based on findings that the modality of sub-contracting e.g. to companies has worked well in areas such as curriculum. Information from both interview respondents as well as broader document analysis also appears to indicate that this modality is suitable to pilots which can be expanded to other provinces.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that for the next phase of design, AHC consider amending the DFA to reflect AHC funded components of the NEAP as reflected in MEHRDs Annual Work Plan.

Our recommendation is based on the fact that it has been difficult for us to track whether program activities have been delivered to agreed time frames and to budget as specified in our ToRs since the design is not fully referenced in the DFA. Further the independent review is premised on assessing progress towards intended outcomes; these are articulated in the design document. To ensure that future reviews are clear about expected benchmarks in which performance is being assessed, it is therefore necessary for a design to be adequately reflected in a DFA as a key accountability document.³

Recommendation 6

DFA key governance arrangements, functions, responsibilities and expected frequency of meetings should if necessary be reviewed and adhered to.

This recommendation is based on our review of governance arrangements which consist of quarterly finance and audit meetings, joint reviews, an Education Development Partners Coordination Group (EDPCG), and a joint budget review. There is also a requirement for risk management and reporting by MEHRD although this is not reflected in its current quarterly and annual reporting.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that AHC in consultation with NZHC and MEHRD ensures that the design process reviews the current governance, management and evaluation arrangements for the continuation of the program with a view to transitioning it from separate Australian and New Zealand mechanisms (e.g. separate reviews, designs, reporting mechanisms) towards a broader based approach aligned around the NEAP to drive accountability and transparency.

Our recommendation is based on reports that separate mechanisms are placing increased transactional costs on MEHRD.

Recommendation 8

In terms of technical focus, it is recommended that a) the next phase of the program should continue to focus on basic education and continue to pursue the key high level goals of the program.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that the majority of children enrolled in school are enrolled in Years 1 – 9 with basic education accounting for 76% of the entire student population. The fact that 70% of them leave school before they finish Year 9 demonstrates the amount of work still left in this sub-sector.

Recommendation 9

The next design team should consider continuing with a focus on literacy (in its broadest sense) and numeracy in basic education and b) gradually increase focus on the higher levels of basic education (junior secondary) c) ECE could be addressed at the policy level d) Consideration could also be given to focusing on integrating TVET with general provision in the sector at both junior secondary and senior secondary level. e) The definition of literacy could be expanded to include aspects of financial literacy. f) The curriculum plan to 2025 should be followed to ensure that all materials including student materials and teacher guides are completed g) Greater support could be given to EAs to enable them, in turn, to support schools and children.

³ Note: Other components of the ESP were referenced more fully in the DFA

Our recommendations are based on our findings that, key goals and assumptions still hold true in relation to basic education and literacy and numeracy since gains made to date need to be sustained but that the next phase of the program should also consider other areas which emerged as a priority during our review

Recommendation 10

Linked to the recommendation above, it is recommended that during the next phase, the program consider including some of the areas which were planned for the original eight-year window of the program e.g. review of textbook delivery chain, some aspects of school grants, innovation grants to EAs. A detailed comparison of the original design with activities as tracked through MEHRD documentation is contained in Annex E. We have also highlighted activities which did not happen but which should be considered by the new design team.

Our recommendations are based on our findings that some of these activities are still relevant. Activities which did not take place or which have been delayed include a focus on numeracy which was due to happen in the second year of the program. Other areas were a review of the platform for SIEMIS, a more in-depth focus on the work of the Inspectorate, more targeted work with EAs (beyond the grants provided by MFAT), specific activities to help the most vulnerable and broader support for decentralization.

Recommendation 11

It is recommended that for the next phase of the program more focus is placed on the EA level using a range of strategies to be identified by the design team including by leveraging aspects of the AHC governance program.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that while currently the MEHRD is well resourced, EAs lack the financial resources and capacity to deliver their programs despite the fact that they have a key role to play in supporting schools. The governance program within AHC has good reach in the provinces and has there is the potential for the two programs to work more closely together to support work at deconcentrated level in the provinces.

Recommendation 12

During the next phase of the program, ensure a focus on the basic opportunities to learn (OTL) exists as a prerequisite for other interventions⁴.

Our recommendations are based on our findings that in the original design the existence of OTL was an assumption in the Theory of Change. OTL includes schools being open every day of the school year and every hour of the school day, teachers being in school and teaching, children being in school, sufficient resources being available etc.. The next design could consider lessons from other regions in this area e.g. teacher codes of conduct, discipline laws etc.

Recommendation 13

During the next phase of the program, it is recommended that partners consider balancing TA investments to areas that provide a direct line of sight to the classroom while at the same time retaining and embedding current system reforms within MEHRD

⁴ See Annex H for a fuller discussion of OTL

Our recommendation is based on the finding that over the course of the program, TA have been concentrated in key priority areas in particular in Component D. This has had a marked effect on the strengthening of the system but attention also needs to be paid to the classroom level where the time lapse between investment and learning outcomes can take much longer.

Recommendation 14

As soon as is feasible, AHC should assist MEHRD to ensure that it has copyright of materials produced on its behalf and is able to use these materials to adapt, modify or turn into digital content. In the longer term, the AHC should also assist MEHRD with procurement and contract negotiations so they are not disadvantaged in the way they have been in relation to text books.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that Pearson publishers still hold the intellectual property rights to materials produced under Nguzu Nguzu. This is atypical for a contract of this nature and means that plans to make the content of e.g. Teacher's Guides available on personal Smart Phones in PDF format is currently not possible.

Recommendation 15

Linked to the above, development partners should consider assisting SIEMIS staff to review whether the current platform of PINEAPPLE is the most appropriate to their needs.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that while SIEMIS provides excellent data to inform decision making, information from interviews showed that currently in order to make small changes to EMIS, expensive external help needs to be sought. The staff working in SIEMIS are talented and capable of managing their own EMIS system.

Recommendation 16

AHC and NZHC should work together where possible, engage in joint meetings and should conduct joint reviews to ensure that the transactional cost on MEHRD is lessened. In particular, the upcoming MFAT review should build on the work of the current mid-term review. The upcoming design should involve both Australia and New Zealand to allow for a more harmonised approach.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that MEHRD felt that the number of reviews asking similar questions added to their work. Although AHC and NHZ are working closely together on a day-to-day basis, some of the activities of NHZ appeared to be siloed.

2. Contextual Background

This chapter contains contextual background to the program focusing particularly on changes which may have occurred over recent years which may not have been apparent at the time of the design. It also contains a history of development partner involvement which sets the scene for the current program. A more detailed discussion of the contextual background can be found at Annex B.

2.1. Recent Development in Contextual Background

Since the original design, there have been a number of development. The implementation of the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2016 – 2035 shows that education and health remain key priorities for the government. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper has been launched with a stronger focus on its engagement in the Pacific. Investments in education remain a strong focus premised on economic benefits for Pacific Island Countries (PICs)

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) exited on 30 June 2017, having successfully worked with Solomon Islands Government (SIG) in its mandate "to restore law and order and re-establish public institutions inclusive of civic institutions, financial infrastructure, the justice system and restoring health and education system and revive the economy following the ethnic tensions of 1998 – 2000".

During the period since the tensions, Solomon Island's economy has grown quite strongly driven by logging, agriculture and the post-conflict expansion in public sector spending. Its growth has averaged 5% over recent years (primarily driven by logging). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) noted that there had been progress in 28% of indicators in the National Development Strategy (NDS) by 2015.

The 2016 – 2020 Education and Strategic Framework and the National Education Action Plan (NEAP) have been released, setting a clear direction for education reform. Expected effects on beneficiaries include improvements in teaching and learning, acquisition of key competencies, increased enrolments, gender balanced retention and completion in both basic and secondary education and to commence reducing other forms of exclusion (geographical, social and economic). The design raised issues of quality and pointed out the low adult literacy rate of 17%. Both of these form key focuses of the new NEAP.

2.2. History of Development Partner Support to Solomon Islands

Development Partners have a long history of support to Solomon Islands and Australia with its strong and effective partnership with New Zealand through joint financing between 2011 and 2014 made significant advances in the education sector. Together with the current

program, Australia's provision of international and Pacific scholarships and regional initiatives related to EMIS and exams makes Australia the largest donor ⁵in the sector.

Solomon Islands also has a long history of successfully managing education Sector Wide Approaches (SWAp) with the first SWAp developed in 2004 by MEHRD, the New Zealand Agency of International Development (NZAID) and the European Commission (EC) to implement the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2004 - 2006. The European Commission ceased supporting general education in 2009 with the EU TVET program ended in 2014.

After the end of 2012, a new agreement was drafted for New Zealand and Australia to support the Education sector in the Solomon Islands. This was signed in February 2013 and was intended to support MEHRD implement its NEAP going forward for the period 2013-2015. The Letter of Arrangement was signed between SIG/MEHRD, New Zealand (NZAID) and Australia (AusAID). The document explicitly stated the responsibilities for the Solomon Islands Government to perform and included the stipulation that SIG should achieve the performance targets set out in the Education Performance Matrix. The setting of annual performance targets was intended to be used to determine additional levels of sector budget support from development partners rather than as a punitive measure to scrutinize MEHRD performance.

In 2015, a new SWAp (see below) was agreed with Australia's supporting mainly curriculum school leader and teacher training, support to the Inspectorate as well as infrastructure development system strengthening within MEHRD and EAs. New Zealand slightly repositioned itself in relation to continued SWAp support through infrastructure development, rehabilitation, competitive grants to Education Authorities (EAs) and initiatives to improve literacy consisting of two major support programs:

1. The Literacy Program Management Unit (LPMU). This unit was initiated in 2014 and is due to end its efforts in 2019. It consists of an international and national expert along with provincial trainers. There is an international TA (although the contract is due to end soon). LPMU is also made up of a team leader, project officer and 3 trainers when at full capacity. There are 9 provincial literacy trainers.

2. The Leadership and Education Authority Program (LEAP) implemented from 2017 to September 2019 and managed by a consortium of the University of Auckland, University of the South Pacific's Institute of Education and a group of local educators and leaders: the Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM). The primary objectives of LEAP are to improve the literacy learning of the children at LEAP primary schools through the following approaches;

- Strengthened relationships between schools, communities, PEAs and MEHRD
- Strengthened leadership at the school level
- Strengthened PEA leadership and support to schools

⁵ 2018 SIG budget strategy.

2.3.The Background to the Current Program

In 2014, the Australian Education Sector Program 2 was designed bringing together key elements of support from DFAT consisting of the following four components:

Component A: Foundation Skills in Basic Education (Literacy and Numeracy)

Component B: Skills for Economic Growth

Component C: Higher Education Scholarships

Component D: Policy, Planning and Resource Management

The design of ESP 2 was conducted in phases. One consultant completed the design for Component B in mid-2014. A team of three consultants completed the designs for Components A and D by December 2014 and the work on Higher Education Scholarships took place in late 2014. The program therefore brought together three sub-sectoral areas of intervention (Foundation Skills in Basic Education, Skills for Economic Growth and more efficient and targeted Scholarships for High Level Skills) with a fourth area of intervention focusing on supporting the delivery of these results through more effective policy making, strategic planning and implementation and more efficient resource management. The design teams working on the various components overlapped for at least part of their time in country.

The program design was originally planned for an eight-year timeframe from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2022 with the aim of “consolidating progress in system development from the past investments to deliver measurable results on the ground” (DFAT and MEHRD, 2014 p.vi)⁶. The program was designed to be delivered in two phases with phase 1 ending on 31st December 2018 with measurable progress towards End of Program Outcomes expected by this date. The original design specified End of Program Outcomes, Intermediate Outcomes as well as Program Outcomes which were intended to be achieved by 2022 rather than by the end of the first phase of the program. However, the Direct Funding Agreement (DFA)⁷ did not go into details of the End of Program Outcomes from the design and the National Education Action Plan 2013 – 2015 was attached to the DFA rather than the design. The DFA also stated that the end of the program would be 30 June 2019. This therefore forms a natural place to refresh, redirect or provide a redesign to the program based on changes which have occurred since the start of the program.

⁶ Investment Design: Solomon Islands Education Sector Program 2: Final December 2014

⁷ Direct Funding Agreement between the Government of Australia as represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Solomon Islands Government as represented by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and the Ministry of Finance and Treasury in relation to Solomon Islands Education Sector Program 2 (DFAT agreement reference number 7147)

3. The Mid-Term Review Process and Content

In April 2018, the Government of Australia through its Education Program in its High Commission in Honiara, Solomon Islands commissioned an independent mid-term review of the following components of its Education Sector Program (ESP):

- Component A: Foundation Skills in Basic Education
- Component D: Policy, Planning and Resource Management

Together these two components are referred to as the ESP2 Basic Education Component (BEC).

ESP2 BEC has the following end of program outcomes:

4. More children complete basic education regardless of socio-economic status, location, gender or disability;
5. Children in basic education achieve improved learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy; and
6. Resources are managed more efficiently and effectively according to a coherent strategic plan and budget.

The MTR team consisted of Barbara Thornton, (Team Leader) and Vena-Liz Upton (Pacific Education Specialist). Alice Eric (AHC) joined as an observer. The respective responsibilities of the team members are contained in Annex A: The ToRs.

3.1. Mid-Term Review Process

3.1.1. Stage 1: Submission of Evaluation Plan

The team began work in June - July 2018 with a document review. The evaluation plan was submitted on 23rd July. The original questions from the ToRs were grouped under broader headers including The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria. The AHC team gave initial feedback on the Evaluation Plan on the first day of the mission in country and suggested some further questions which would be useful to investigate. A final version of the evaluation plan incorporating these was submitted on 26th July. A total of 33 questions were grouped under seven broad categories as follows:

Table 1: Key Review Questions and Sub-Questions

Note: Key sub-questions, signaled as of particular interest to AHC are signaled in bold

| Key Review Questions (KRQs) | Sub-questions |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| RELEVANCE | |

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| 1. To what extent are the rationale for BEC, BEC's current Goal, Intermediate Outcomes, End of Program Outcomes, Program Outputs and Performance Targets remain relevant and achievable? | 1.1. Are they still aligned with Australian and SIG priorities? |
| | 1.2. What has changed since the start of the program (including LEAP and MFAT positioning)? |
| | 1.3. Are BEC goals still aligned with current needs in the sector? |
| | 1.4. Does the theory of change for the program still hold? |
| EFFECTIVENESS AND END RESULTS | |
| 2. How has ESP 2 performed? | 2.1. Is the program still pursuing the original Goal, Intermediate Outcomes, End of Program Outcomes, Program Outputs and Performance Targets? |
| | 2.1a. What has worked well and why? |
| | 2.1b To what extent is the program effectively supporting reform? |
| | 2.2. What has not worked well and why? What aspects could be improved? |
| | 2.3. Are the key program objectives realistic and likely to be achieved within the remaining time available? Why/ why not? |
| | 2.4. What lessons can be learned from the program to date? |
| | 2.5. What have been the challenges and enablers to program effectiveness? |
| EFFICIENCY | |
| 3. To what extent have program activities and outputs been delivered to agreed quality standards, timeframes and budgets? | 3.1. To what extent have program activities been delivered to agreed timeframes and budgets? |
| 4. What role has technical assistance played in the program? | 4.1. What areas have TA been concentrated in? |
| | 4.2. To what extent have TA been targeted in the right priorities and areas? |
| DELIVERY APPROACH | |
| 5. To what extent has the delivery approach been effective? | 5.1. To what extent has the delivery approach of budget support been effective? |
| | 5.2. To what extent have governance mechanisms been effective in resolving program issues and supporting compliance, transparency and accountability of program decisions and expenditure (in line with the Direct Funding Agreement)? |
| | 5.3. What structures are used to manage aid in the AHC? |
| | 5.4. To what extent has ESP 2 BEC's use of partner systems helped to strengthen those systems? |
| | 5.5. To what extent has the monitoring and evaluation of the program been robust and aligned with government M&E? |
| | 5.6. How could the delivery approach be improved? |
| | 5.7. To what extent have parallel support mechanisms been beneficial? |
| FUTURE | |
| 6. What recommendations can be provided for the future direction of Australia's support to education (including but not limited to basic education) in Solomon Islands following the completion of ESP2 in mid-2019? | 6.1. What steps should ESP2 BEC take during the remainder of the program to improve, in particular: |
| | 6.1.a. How could ESP2 BEC better identify lessons from what it does, and apply this to adjust programming on an ongoing basis? |
| | 6.1.b. What activities should ESP2 BEC persist with, refine or cease? |
| | 6.2. What support is still required in the area of basic education? |
| | 6.3. What are the key demand issues? |
| | 6.4. Where are the blockages? |
| CROSS-CUTTING AREAS | |
| 7. To what extent are cross-cutting issues being addressed? | 7.1. To what extent is the program gender-sensitive? |
| | 7.2. To what extent is it supporting benefits for children with disabilities? |
| | 7.3. To what extent is it supporting benefits for children from diverse backgrounds including the very poor? |

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| | 7.4. To what extent does the program adequately manage its impact on the environment? |
| | 7.5. To what extent have child protection mechanisms been taken into account? |

3.1.2. Stage 2: Work in country

The MTR team undertook work in Solomon Islands from 26 July to 10 August 2018 consisting of further document review and school visits in Rennell-Bellona and Western Provinces and Honiara. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were held with selected Provincial and Church Education Authorities, Head-Teachers, Teachers, School communities, Parents and Students. The MTR team also met with Solomon Islands Government representatives from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination (MDPAC). Development Partners and NGOs were also interviewed.

3.1.3. Stage 3 Presentation of Aide Memoire

An aide memoire presented the team's preliminary findings at the end of the in-country period along with a results chart. Feedback on this Aide Memoire helped to shape further analysis and the report writing phase of this document which presents the review team's findings and recommendations. (See Annex D for the Aide Memoire and Annex F for the results chart).

4. Approach and Methodology of the Mid-Term Review

The ESP2 BEC MTR was undertaken in two phases. The first Phase consisted of Australia's update review of Solomon Islands Government (SIG) 2012 Public Financial Management – Education Sector Assessment of National Systems and a SIG Education Sector Procurement Assessment in late 2017. The purpose of Phase 2 was to undertake summative and formative assessments of Australia's education investments commencing 2015 to date (July 2018) of Component A: Foundation Skills in Basic Education and Component D: Policy Planning and Resource Management.

The findings of the review will be used to inform key management decisions related to ways forward in the sector, including design of the next phase of support. The primary MTR audience is the Australian High Commission Education Program and MEHRD. The MTR findings will also be used to inform the New Zealand High Commission's future Education Program.

4.1. General Approach

The general approach was primarily qualitative with data quantified where possible. It consists of: document review, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Site

visits were based on high, medium and low performance EAs and used an observation form. Meetings were also held with a number of Year 6 students (boys and girls). The review questions provided in the ToRs were grouped according to broad criteria and questions and sub-questions were numbered. These were cross-referenced to the instruments (See Table 1 on page 17 for the full list of review questions).

4.2. Methodology

The methodology of the MTR consisted of:

- A document analysis
- Individual consultations
- Site visits

Data Collection Instruments

A range of data collection instruments were designed to cater for different stakeholders and different data collection modalities.

(See Annex G for a sample of data collection instruments)

4.3. Data treatment and analysis

Results of initial documents analysed and data collected were initially typed up into an Excel spreadsheet cross-referenced to questions. In the later stages of the exercise, data was simply typed up.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

The evaluation was based on the Australian Council for International Development Principles 8. (2017). *Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development*.

4.5. Limitations

As with all studies of this nature there are limitations although care was taken to mitigate the risks associated with these. (A full description of the methodology and the ways in which limitations were managed can be found in Annex C).

⁸ Australian Council for International Development Principles 8. (2017). *Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development*. Canberra, Australia: ACID.

5. Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the findings across the five areas of the MTR framework.⁹ In this chapter, we have looked at each key review area and extracted the key results in terms of both formative and summative findings. Key recommendations are made which relate to the findings. It should be noted that in studies of this nature, the relationship between a recommendation and finding is not always one to one in that a recommendation may be based on several findings. This is reflected in Chapter 6

5.2. Relevance

In this review, the relevance criteria relate specifically to the relevance of the ESP2 BEC program to Australian and SIG development priorities and in particular whether the higher-level goals still remain relevant. The changes which have occurred since the outset of the program are also described in this section.

The key question of interest to partners in this section was **Are BEC goals still aligned with current needs in the sector?**

Overall Relevance Finding - The mid-term review has found that 1) there have been a number of changes since the outset of the program and that some of these have affected some aspects of the original theory of change at activity level. However, the review has found that 2) the program is still very much aligned with Australian and SIG priorities and the original goals still hold true as do the underlying assumptions and 3) The program is also relevant to needs of the sector including at both policy and implementation level

Relevance Finding 1 – There have been a number of changes since the outset of the program. However the program is still relevant to needs on the ground and is helping expand access to, and quality of basic education.

A number of changes have occurred since the start of the program. The 2016 – 2020 Education and Strategic Framework and the National Education Action Plan 2016 – 2030 (NEAP) have been released, setting a clear direction for education reform. Expected effects on beneficiaries include improvements in teaching and learning, acquisition of key competencies, increased enrolments, gender balanced retention and completion in both basic and secondary education and to commence reducing other forms of exclusion (geographical, social and economic).

The SSU have developed a Theory of Change which is well understood by all Ministry counterparts and is in alignment with the original ESP2 theory of change.

After many years of discussion, the Prep Year has been abolished and is to be replaced with a pre-primary year for 5 year olds funded through MEHRD. ECE will be community funded and for 3 year olds upwards. UNICEF and other NGOs are active in this area.

As mentioned in the original design, there was a need for flexibility given changes which the design had anticipated. These changing circumstances meant that some activities did not take place. In delaying some of these activities from the original design, the program possibly has moved at a more realistic pace.

However, the Key EOPOs still hold and in particular:

EOPO 1: More children complete basic education, regardless of socio-economic status, location, gender and disability

And

EOPO 2: Children in basic education achieve improved learning outcomes especially in literacy and numeracy.¹⁰

One area to note is that the original ToC in the design contained a number of key assumptions related to Opportunity to Learn (OTL). In the intervening years since the design of the program, OTL has become an area of research which posits that unless certain fundamental conditions are in place, then higher level interventions may fail. OTL includes areas such as the minimum number of hours the school is open, the teacher being in school for all the hours that a school is open, the school being within a reasonable distance for the child to access etc. A number of studies have found correlations between OTL and performance on Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA)¹¹.

[Relevance Finding 2 – The program continues to align closely with education priorities of SIG and Australia.](#)

As already noted in Section 2.1. The implementation of the Solomon Islands National Development Strategy 2016 – 2035 show that education and health remain key priorities for the government. Australia's Aid Investment Plan retains a strong commitment to education. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper has been launched with a stronger focus on its engagement in the Pacific. Investments in education remain a strong focused premised on economic benefits for Pacific Island Countries.

[Relevance Finding 3 – The program is also relevant to needs of the sector including at both policy and implementation level](#)

¹⁰ ESP Design document

¹¹ See Annex H: Opportunity to Learn

The Program is well integrated within the NEAP rather than being seen as a separate program from donors, although Australian support to education in Solomon Islands is well known and appreciated¹². On the ground, it is having success in increasing access as well as addressing quality.

While changes have occurred in the political landscapes of both Australia and Solomon Islands, education continues to be a strong priority focus for continued investments by both countries.

5.3 . Effectiveness and End Results

This section looks at how well the program has been delivered to date including the pursuance of original goals, the extent of the program's reach, the challenges and enablers of program successes to date as well as lessons learned. The program was originally planned in an eight-year time frame which, at the time was considered realistic in order to achieve the end of program outcomes. In this section, end results refers to both formative results to date as well as the summative outcomes originally intended at the end of the program in 2022. The text makes clear which is being referred to. The impact of the program is not comprehensively reviewed although we refer to this where relevant below.

The questions of particular interest to partners in this section are:

- What has worked well and why?
- To what extent is the program effectively supporting reform?
- What has not worked well and why? What aspects could be improved?

Overall Effectiveness Finding - The mid-term review has found that 1) the program has been effective in is progress towards intermediate and end of program outcomes although at activity level, some interventions have not taken place. Also, under the strong leadership of the Ministry and with the support of the SSU 2) appetite for reform is strong and 3) there was evidence that MEHRD was much stronger and better organized at central level and that the program is making a difference at the level of the school. However, there was an indication that certain aspects of the program were functioning less well particularly 4) in the area of PFM as well as decentralization and school grants. The copyright for school materials remains problematic and the platform for SIEMIS may not necessarily represent best value for money or meet the everyday functionality needs of the unit.

Effectiveness Finding 1 – The program continues to pursue intermediate and end of program outcomes as in the original design under the strong leadership of MEHRD with progress in a number of key areas although some activities have yet to be implemented or have dropped away (see Annex E).

The program continues to pursue intermediate and end of program outcomes as envisaged in the original design. The strong leadership within the Ministry and the creation of the SSU

¹² This was evidenced through interviews within MEHRD, the EAs as well as with schools and communities

have ensured a focus on final goals in the sector which are still those from the original design, themselves based on the SIG documents at the time.

There has been measurable progress against the two end of program outcomes (See Effectiveness Finding 3 below):

EPOPO 1: More children complete basic education, regardless of socio-economic status, location, gender and disability

And

EPOPO 2: Children in basic education achieve improved learning outcomes especially in literacy and numeracy.¹³

However, there are some changes at activity level from the original design. Activities which have continued to be supported include professional development, support for SSU, infrastructure, LPMU (NZHC funded), systems strengthening in procurement, financial management, planning and reporting and M & E, curriculum and pilots such as the vernacular pilot in Malaita.

It should be remembered that the original design was for 8 rather than 4 years¹⁴ and activities which did not take place or which have been delayed include a focus on numeracy which was due to happen in the second year of the program. Other areas were a review of the platform for SIEMIS, a more in-depth focus on the work of the Inspectorate, more targeted work with EAs (beyond the grants provided by MFAT), specific activities to help the most vulnerable and broader support for decentralisation.

Effectiveness Finding 2 - The appetite for reform appears to be strong.

This is particularly the case at central level and among higher level officials but also within EAs, schools and communities. This includes teachers and school leaders. A number of initiatives are taking place to improve systems and policies. Within SSU, planning, reporting, monitoring and evaluation and more broadly procurement, asset management and HR have either already been strengthened or are in the process of being strengthened.

The new NEAP is widely known and is being used to inform reform in a number of sub-sectors e.g. ECE, secondary curriculum as well as the planning of AWP and PEAPs.

There is a clearer demarcation of functions of divisions and roles of individuals within MEHRD because of the recent restructuring as well as strong Ministry leadership combined with TA support. Performance Management and Planning commenced in 2017 and is being embedded. However, the issue of compliance with financial regulations remains a challenge (see Efficiency Section below).

¹³ ESP Design document

Effectiveness Finding 3 - There is evidence the program is making some difference at the level of the school both in terms of access as well as quality.

Access has increased from the start of the program reflecting measurable progress against End of Program Outcome 1: More children complete basic education, regardless of socio-economic status, location, gender and disability.

Table 2 : GER and NER 2015 and 2017

| | 2015 (Start of program) | 2017 |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------|
| GER primary | 116% | 118% |
| NER primary | 91% | 92.3% |

The gender parity index has also improved especially at upper levels possibly due to the building of ablution blocks for girls.

However, other indicators are static or have decreased, although some of these results may be connected with data collection techniques.

Table 3: Other Key Indicators 2015 and 2017

| | 2015 (Start of program) | 2017 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Drop out rate primary | 5% | |
| Transition rate from Year 6 to Year 7 | 93% | 89.1% |
| Survival rate to Year 6 | 70% ¹⁵ | 56.3% |

Repetition rates as well as the number of overage children also increased between 2015 and 2017.

While changes in quality typically take much longer, there is some indication of progress in relation to end of program outcome 2. Children in basic education achieve improved learning outcomes especially in literacy and numeracy.¹⁶

There does appear to be an improvement in learning outcomes in literacy reported by some respondents but there is also evidence from SISTA¹⁷ with 67% of Year 4 students and 69% of

¹⁵ PAR 2016 and 2017 give different figures

¹⁶ ESP Design document

¹⁷ Although MEHRD is being conservative in reporting on improvements in literacy between the last administration of SISTA in 2015 and that of 2017, there are probably sufficient linking items to be able to say there have been improvements in literacy over the last 3 years. This cannot be stated with confidence for numeracy where there are insufficient linking items although scores also improved in this area

Year 6 students at the expected level or above in reading. It should be noted that it is generally felt that numeracy is less of a problem than literacy.

In our focus groups with teachers and school principals and MEHRD staff reported increased awareness of the importance of early literacy which is a prerequisite before any behavioural change can take place in the classroom. The program has also impacted the classroom level through infrastructure, grants, curriculum reform and teacher and school leaders professional development. Teacher professional development¹⁸ was mentioned but school leaders professional development was particularly successful in its focus both on pedagogical leadership as well as administrative and managerial meaning that teachers had a source of professional support often for the first time. EAs and MEHRD also mentioned that while management and acquittal of grants had improved since 2015, it was frequently a challenge for many principals. However, those school leaders who had been through the USP course had no problems at all in managing the grants in their schools. The fact that management in schools managed by these principals was generally much better was mentioned by MEHRD. The enabling factor for the success of this aspect of the School Leadership program appears to include: a) intrinsic motivation: school leaders were happy and proud to receive post-graduate certification from a reputable university and b) the course had immediate applicability to the workplace. Australian support was acknowledged for these positive outcomes. Curriculum reform is starting to make a difference after a history of stalled progress. The secondary curriculum is modern in approach, streamlining and updating subjects needed for school graduates of the 21st century. The plan to support the effectiveness of curriculum delivery appears realistic and well thought through. The new curriculum and in particular Solomon Islands Senior Secondary Curriculum Framework are innovative, much more practical in nature and provide a number of pathways for young people, giving equal value to technical and academic subjects.¹⁹

Performance standards have been set for EAs using a participatory process and a number of EAs have been assessed against these although these standards are yet to be fully implemented. Although these have yet to be fully rolled out, an enabling factor to success was the involvement of EAs in the standard setting process itself. Since this identifies areas of weakness, it is also a useful precursor to more in-depth interventions.

Effectiveness Finding 4 - Some parts of the original program were going less well including some aspects of school grants, the materials delivery chain for textbooks and other materials, as well as issues with copyright.

While grants are getting to schools, there was a lack of transparency at some of the schools in relation to the process of decision making and how grants are allocated especially where there is little involvement by parents and the community. Where there is strong parent / community – school relationship, and a strong school board, the system of grants is working

¹⁸ The round table discussion of teachers did not include any who had taken part in the training and we were only able to obtain secondary data in this area.

¹⁹ SICP Senior Secondary School Curriculum Post Consultation 150618

well, and the community supports the school in several other ways. The school management handbook which has recently been developed will certainly help to clarify issues.

The curriculum to text book delivery chain is still not working well. While some aspects of Bontoux's report²⁰ into the text book delivery chain have been acted on e.g. delivering to EAs rather than to each school, there are still issues related to delivery and in particular delivery cost especially where the provincial office is situated far from more remote islands. All EAs visited reported degrees of blockage at the level of the EA who are supposed to be in charge of book distribution and delivery. Various ways of overcoming this problem have been attempted including inspectors delivering some of the books as they visit schools and MEHRD Grants Unit keeping back some books so that teachers from schools can come to Honiara to collect the books themselves.

MEHRD is making good progress with its work on curriculum since the involvement of Cognition as noted above with curriculum support materials well under way and a new curriculum drafted for senior secondary. The idea that newer technologies should be made use of but in a limited way was presented at the Mid-Term Review with one suggestion being that Teacher's Guides for Primary should be put into a PDF format for teachers to easily access on mobile phones and other personal devices. However, the contract with the publishers, Pearson, keeps copyright firmly with the publisher and does not allow MEHRD to have soft copies of the books it has produced for Solomon Islands meaning MEHRD is only able to buy physical, hard copies of the books. This is most unusual given that the contract was signed over 10 years ago.²¹ Typically, in contracts of this nature with national Ministries of Education, the intellectual property rights would normally revert to the Ministry after a period of two to five years.²²

One other area of concern is right age enrolment especially given the introduction of the Pre-Primary Year. MEHRD has been specific that this is for 5 year olds. However, currently only 21.7% of 5 year olds are enrolled in Prep and a significant number of children are over age in Grade 1. Two studies in 2015²³ showed that right age enrolment was problematic for geographical and cultural reasons. Children were often felt to be too small to travel the long and difficult journeys to school. A further difficulty found during our own review was that some communities are now building ECE centres including prep in the anticipation that staff for these will be funded and grants will be provided. Disappointment will result when this does not ensue.

Opportunity to Learn is an issue with particularly high rates of teacher absenteeism in Renbell (PAR, 2017). Interviews with children, communities and teachers also found that the school day was considerably shorter than the official hours and that absenteeism on the part of children was also a problem.

²⁰ Bontoux, V. (2014), Report into textbook management

²¹ Our interviews indicated that this condition in the contract was still in place

²² Source:

²³ Minford, 2015, Thornton, 2015

SIEMIS has been exemplary of providing data to inform decision making as evidenced by the high quality of the most recent PAR. However, the platform associated with SIEMIS could be reviewed since staff within MEHRD are unable to add questions without calling in expensive external experts. Neighbouring countries have moved away from the regional platform used for EMIS (Pineapple) and are using open source platforms. The staff working within EMIS in MEHRD are extremely capable and would be able to use such platforms without external assistance.

Effectiveness / Efficiency Finding 5 - EAs are struggling to fulfil the tasks required of them. They lack both human and financial resources and acknowledge skill deficits.

The extent to which provincial visits by central MEHRD and other development partners are incorporated into provincial annual work plans are unclear and appear to impact. Lack of such visits impact on PEA's ability to implement activities effectively and efficiently. Accountabilities between MEHRD, provincial governments and PEAs and EA's are unclear.

While MEHRD at central level is well staffed, this is not the case with PEAs and EAs. The recent standards for EAs have the potential to make some difference. However, due to poor resourcing (human and financial) Chief Education Officers/Secretaries of PEAs and EAs are unable to focus adequately on 'what matters' i.e. supporting teachers and schools. This was apparent in lower performing PEA and EAs that the review team consulted. For example, school visits were not being undertaken due to transportation limitations, and where they did take place, there were inadequate skills to support teachers and school committees. However, innovation grants which commenced in 2018 through MFAT funding if expanded could potentially make a difference to the work of EAs. It should also be noted that some of the tasks required of EAs appear in no one's job description e.g. the delivery of books.

There was also poor understanding about accountabilities to MEHRD and provincial governments and the differences between the role of MEHRD in policy implementation vis-a-vis the role of PEAs. There is some dissatisfaction with the perceived growth in number of visits to provinces (particularly larger ones) by central MEHRD and others (e.g. MTR team/other partners) and the impact it has on a PEAs ability to focus on policy implementation.

5.4. Efficiency

This review looked at the following aspects to respond to the efficiency question. Specifically, the review looked at firstly whether the program was delivered as planned (quality standards, budgets, activities and timelines). The specific key question here was: *To what extent have program activities and outputs been delivered to agreed quality standards, timeframes and budgets?*

Efficiency Finding - The ESP 2 BEC has achieved the bulk of its planned outputs and activities. These have been by default been delivered within budget since AHC agrees the annual budget with MEHRD and does not reimburse costs above this budget.

Efficiency Finding 1 - It has been difficult to track whether program activities have been delivered to agreed time frames as Australia's Direct Financing Arrangement (DFA) does not give details of the Basic Education Component nor is the design document annexed to the DFA. However, the reviewers have been able to draw results from other key documentation. These are summarized in Annex E which looks at what actually happened against ESP2 BEC components A and D outputs and activities. Missing information and activities which dropped from the design are highlighted in yellow.

Outputs and activities in the Design document are not prescriptive in that it does not indicate when activities were meant to have been started or completed. Subsequent annual work plans following finalization of the design (included as amendments/LOAs to the DFA) would have enabled the reviewers to assess whether outputs and activities were implemented within agreed timeframes, particularly given that the NEAP attached to the DFA consisted of the previous one of 2013-2015. Similarly, the extent to which the design articulates the 'expected quality' required for implementation of activities is not apparent nor was this translated to the DFA.

Similarly, the extent to which outputs and activities have been achieved within budget has been difficult to track, partly because the DFA does not require this level of financial reporting but also because SIG financial reporting requirements do not appear to require financial expenditure against program outputs or activities. While the reviewers have not been able to source data at that level it is clear from the documentation reviewed that there have been inefficiencies in the system leading to underspends over the life of the Program. It has also been difficult to draw direct comparisons between AHC expenditure and correlate this with MEHRD financial information as DFA and expenses are in Australian dollars while MEHRD reporting is in Solomon Islands currency. The tables below reflect this. In reviewing financial information, there are areas that could be improved that would help to strengthen future financial reporting of this nature. Findings and recommendations for this section are outlined under each financial table and the recommendations cross-referenced to the overall findings in Chapter 7. In terms of how DFAT could support MEHRD improve its efficiency of spend this will be addressed in later sections, particularly under the Delivery Approach section discussed in Section 6.

Table 3 Budget Efficiency against Design Outputs and Activities

Australia and New Zealand budget and expenditure 372 – 2017 (SBD) – Source 2017 Annual Report

2017 - Component A & D

| Cost Center | DFAT | MFAT | Total Budget Allocated |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Asset Management Unit | 13,950,000 | | 13,950,000 |
| Central HQ Administration | 2,432,109 | | 2,432,109 |
| Curriculum Development Unit | 9,300,000 | | 93,000,000 |
| Early Childhood Education | 1,500,000 | | 1,500,000 |
| Grants Unit | 1,000,000 | | 1,000,000 |
| LPMU | | 5,200,000 | 5,200,000 |
| Makira Ulawa Province | 2,373,887.24 | 1,399,949.76 | 3,773,837 |
| National Exam Service | 5,567,891 | | 5,567,891 |
| Provincial Support | 2,000,000 | 3,400,000 | 5,400,000 |
| Schools Inspectorate | 4,450,000 | | 4,450,000 |
| Teacher Training and Development | 15,800,000 | 1,000,000 | 16,800,000 |
| Total | 58,373,887 | 10999949.76 | 153,073,837 |

Note: A total of SBD40,353,986 is unutilized due to several underspends relating to planning and procurement.

Table 4 MEHRD overall budget including actual expenses for 2015, 2016 and 2017

| Year | 272 Revised Budget | 272 Actuals | % Expended |
|------|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| 2015 | 799,603,681 | 756,866,837 | 95% |
| 2016 | 975,774,378 | 882,525,384 | 90% |
| 2017 | 1,198,288,453 | 1,079,030,717 | 90% |
| Year | 372 Revised Budget | 372 Actuals | % Expended |
| 2015 | 122,266,716 | 98,927,432 | 81% |
| 2016 | 90,000,000 | 58,051,989 | 65% |
| 2017 | 70,373,837 | 30,019,851 | 43% |
| Year | 472 Revised Budget | 472 Actuals | % Expended |
| 2015 | 82,000,000 | 80,892,184 | 99% |
| 2016 | 77,000,000 | 73,657,232 | 96% |
| 2017 | 77,000,000 | 61,325,652 | 80% |

Source: Performance Assessment Report 2017

Efficiency Finding 2 - Financial allocations for Development Partners are done against cost centres and actual expenditure analysis is presented on overall DP funds

This means that we have been unable to track expenditure at activity and output level over 2015-2017²⁴. The MEHRD 2017 Performance Assessment Report provides a summary of annual actual expenditure. While it is not at activity or output level it provides a fuller picture of expenditure trends over a three-year period. It should be acknowledged that activity-level budget reporting has been introduced in 2018.

Efficiency Finding 3 - Operating expenses are based on reimbursable amounts and performance payments based on achievement of mutually agreed indicators which may have efficiency implications for DFAT.

While figures above show annual variances between 0.5 million – 0.7 million, this reflects the nature of the basis of payments e.g. that there is no way of predicting how much the Government will spend or achieve each year. This may have efficiency implications for DFAT e.g. underspends would affect its ability to meet annual bottom lines. TA expenditure appears to equate to more than the amount reflected in the DFA excess amounts reflect financing for parallel funding in support of achievements of the BAC.

TA Finding While Technical Assistance (TA) provided by Australia is highly valued, opportunities remain to further maximize use of expertise at an individual and system level, by strengthening current capacity development approaches. The review has found that the MEHRD management has been successful in drawing on much needed expertise especially in areas related to planning. There was an instance in lack of handover between TAs doing similar roles as well as delays in procuring key TA e.g. the MEL advisor. While current Australian funded TA are targeted in the right areas, gaps remain and oversight of TA has not always been as rigorous as it could have been.

TA Finding 1 - Over the course of the program, TA have been concentrated in key priority areas in particular in Component A.

While Technical Assistance has been concentrated in priority areas these have mostly related to component D of the Program which is focused on supporting the efficiency aspects of the education system and strengthening policy, planning and resourcing. In effect, they represent a risk mitigation measure and are a necessary requirement in order to be able to operate a budget support program. Technical Assistance has not focused on component A in a similarly balanced way²⁵. However, in general TA appear to have focussed on strengthening central systems, and while appropriate, similar effort also needs to be made to identify areas which would leverage tangible gains in the classroom (especially in the more disadvantaged provinces) as well as sustain system strengthening efforts over the longer term. The first table below provides a summary of where DFATs TA have been concentrated sourced from MEHRD.

Table 5 Summary of Technical Assistance procured over the period 2015-16 to 2018-19

| Financial Year | Technical Assistance | Design Component | Procured by |
|-----------------|---|------------------|-------------|
| FY2015-16 | School Board Strengthening services -Choiseul province | A | DFAT |
| | Human Resources Management | D | |
| | Education Quality | A | |
| | Payment & Contract management specialist | D | |
| | Procurement Adviser | A | |
| | Assessments (Psychometrician) | A | |
| | Field research specialists for PABER | D | |
| | Design support for Provincial Education Action Plans | D | |
| | Procurement and Project Management Adviser; Architects and Construction Management Services | D | |
| 2016-17-2017-18 | | A | |

²⁵ Mention was made of specific TA help in e.g. the curriculum which have enabled key progress to be made once this area was taken over by Australia. This is an area which clearly impacts the classroom level and as such is a prime example of the placement.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|-------------|
| | PACTAM Adviser Teacher Work-force Reform | D | |
| FY2017-18, 2018-19 | Budget and Finance Procurement and Project Management Education Sector Management Adviser Assessments Asset Management Division Monitoring and Evaluation Curriculum (procured through MEHRD) | D D D A D D A | |
| 2015 | Support to LPMU | A | MFAT |

TA Finding 2 – Contracting, Oversight and Management of TA could be strengthened

Australia has been punctilious in ensuring that request for TA have originated from MEHRD and that MEHRD has had significant input into their ToRs. However, reporting (outputs and supervisory) accountabilities require clarification to ensure all relevant parties are clear about the scope and nature of deliverables required, by TAs. The reviewers found that current reporting requirements are unclear to some TA interviewed as well as to MEHRD counterparts. For example, TAs are required to submit reports to DFAT which may not be copied to MEHRD. The reviewers were unable to obtain all reports by TAs that have been procured over the life of the Program, although a few have been forthcoming²⁶. TA reports are essential accountability documents, given these have not been made available to MEHRD or the Donor has meant that outputs have not been able to be captured in MEHRD reporting or used to adequately inform progress in reform areas.

TA performance assessments are a mandatory requirement by DFAT. However, consultations with TA indicate that performance assessments may not be applied consistently or are lagging.

The importance of interpersonal skills and the ability to work cross-culturally should not be underestimated. This was emphasised by MEHRD during consultations as well as the fact that this cannot necessarily be seen from CVs or during interviews and only becomes apparent once a TA has been deployed.

TA often also adopt a more collegial advisory role making one respondent reluctant to offer constructive criticism in the fear that the TA would be judged negatively by DFAT, further complicating the management of TA.

The gap between the Education Sector Advisor (ESA) who left in 2016 and his replacement created difficulties due to lack of opportunity for hand over, differing areas of expertise and

²⁶ Reports from ESMA and M&E Advisers, PACTAM adviser completion report (2016), HPE Content Manager

understanding of the role. The previous ESA had acted in an oversight role of other TA in the Ministry, alerting donors of problems and assisting MEHRD with their management. This did not happen with his replacement. While an Education Sector Management Adviser (ESMA) was recruited full time in 2017, the Education Sector Adviser role was not replaced. This may be sensible in that the ESMA is taking over broad aspects of the role of sector coordination and she has been instrumental in helping the SSU in its smooth functioning. Since 2018, her role is only part time. Similar gaps also caused challenges between gaps in deployment of both volunteers and MFAT-funded literacy advisers who had differences of approaches in their technical viewpoints as to the best way of approaching reading in the classroom.

The delay in the deployment of the M&E advisor in 2017 also meant that a robust M & E plan could only be developed and implemented later in the program.

Efficiency TA Finding 3 - While TA in Finance and Procurement are assisting MEHRD to monitor and manage fiduciary risk (by ensuring compliance with Solomon Islands Government (SIG) PFM Act, Financial Instructions and Procurement Rules) greater emphasis on how proposed procurements and payment requisitions could be strengthened to support greater compliance is required.

MEHRD procurement and finance remain a challenge. Concerns remain around ensuring that all procurements are forecast and incorporated into Annual Work Plans. Challenges remain around forecasting procurement which in turn impacts on expenditure. While there is provision for these to be adjusted on a quarterly basis this process still requires embedding. Where advisers have assessed that proposed procurements are not fully compliant with SIG PFM and Procurement rules, rather than rejecting a requisition it is important that MEHRD officers understand the reasons for non-compliance and receive the necessary support to ensure that requisitions are able to be revised to meet compliance in a timely manner.

Several requests for TA ²⁷ were suggested during interviews, refer to Annex I which provides TA suggestions for the remainder of the program including whether these positions should be local or international, short vs long-term etc. .

5.5. Delivery Approach

In this section, we look at the delivery approach and in particular to what extent parallel mechanisms and the modality of budget support have been effective. We also look at the governance mechanisms and their effectiveness as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the project. The question of particular interest to AHC in this section was in what ways, if any, could the delivery approach be improved.

²⁷ Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, Accra Agenda for Action

Overall Delivery Approach Finding - The overall system of budget is working effectively to both deliver services and strengthen systems

Delivery Finding 1 - The system of Budget Support is aligned with best practice, the process contains sufficient safeguards, allows Australia to be a valued partner contributing to high-level discussions and is the only feasible way of reaching all parts of the country.

Budget support has generally been viewed as the prominent aid modality in terms of best practice according to international agreements.²⁸. Other documentation commissioned concludes that measures to ensure compliance are adequate and that.:

“There is evidence that in the context of Solomon Islands budget support is strengthening government systems as evidenced by increased compliance of staff with their own regulations. It is also acting as a driver for government to put in place its own more detailed and clearer manuals to be followed. Furthermore, while many of the parallel projects are well known and are reaching school level, they do not have the type of reach that Australia’s current modality of budget support is achieving in terms of accessing all parts of the country even the remote and the most vulnerable “

The modality was valued by senior officials and its continuation in effect means that Australia and New Zealand can be viewed as partners “with a seat at the table” when it comes to high-level discussions.

Budget support is also the only feasible way of reaching all parts of the country. As stated in the methodology section, our site visits included some remote and disadvantaged areas. Although in two weeks, it is only possible to get a snapshot view, we found that the program had reached schools in terms of curriculum, some materials, as well as positive influence on teachers through training. This was particularly true of the training for School Principals, who are frequently the only source of professional development available to teachers.. The fact that principals and head teachers attending this course had received training in pedagogical leadership had filtered down to the classroom in some of the schools visited.

While this is positive, the reviewers found that there is scope to strengthen the delivery approach particularly in terms of enhancing the operational and PLA mechanisms employed by AHC.

Delivery Finding 2 – Opportunity to strengthen operational modality

Some respondents were familiar with DFAT’s performance framework and the concept of both PLA²⁹ and Cash on Delivery. In the case of Solomon Islands, the PLA element is

additional. This was understood by some of the respondents interviewed. While the merits of the PLA were valued in that it helped to facilitate substantive policy discussion between the partners. However, some respondents viewed it “punitive” and “stick and carrot”. This view may have formed due to a lack of consistency in approach. For instance, different consultants were used to assess performance indicators in different years. The number of indicators also changed on a yearly basis as did the methodology used. While an annual discussion of findings against performance by an independent consultant is helpful, one previous assessor stated in their report that while MEHRD staff were very much involved in the setting of indicators, the time allowed for this was short and there was a tendency to be over optimistic. Such a feeling is natural as educators want to ensure that educational benefits reach children as soon as possible but in other Pacific countries, a very slight increase in (for example) literacy outcomes is considered the standard.

In an effort to balance the punitive feelings associated with PLA and move away from a donor – recipient relationship towards a more balanced partnership relationship, it was suggested that indicators of performance could be set for both DFAT as well as MEHRD³⁰. Examples of indicators could be responsiveness in terms of time and feedback to requests for TAs, the ability of the donor to predict in precise terms what the funding might be for Government in the coming year.

One helpful suggestion was that AHC consider that in its future program it amends its financing modalities to ensure that disbursements of operational funds are linked to process indicators that support MEHRD to meet its own accountability requirements. For instance, the current operational tranche could be disbursed according to a fixed tranche linked to specific process indicators that support compliance with SIG’s own accountability requirements, for example, which may include, whether governance meetings are occurring, whether performance appraisals are being undertaken or whether regular audits and audit outcomes are being adequately addressed. This would assist to incentivise compliance and accountability and enable greater predictability for budgeting and planning.

In terms of the PLA system of assessment, PLA indicators could be linked to a defined number of NEAP access and quality end of outcome indicators. Progress trends towards achievement of outcomes could act as triggers for disbursement to ensure that NEAP priority activities proceed as planned. Development of a clear set of guidelines for independent verification articulated at the outset of the future program together with identification of the skills sets required to undertake the process would help to ensure consistency in approach and that is non-punitive.

²⁹ [Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid.](#)

³⁰ McNaughton, B.

Delivery Finding 3 - Governance structures are to some extent used for accountability and transparency purposes in-line with the DFA. However, there is scope to ensure that these are better utilised for the purposes of driving sector wide planning, budgeting, reporting and monitoring and evaluation and managing high level development and system risks. They could also be strengthened to ensure adequate feed-back loops are in place to assist coordination and communication.

The DFA identifies key governance arrangements, functions, responsibilities (who) and expected frequency of meetings. Governance arrangements consist of quarterly finance and audit meetings, joint reviews, an Education Development Partners Coordination Group (EDPCG), and a joint budget review³¹. There is also a requirement for risk management and reporting by MEHRD although this is not reflected in its current quarterly and annual reporting.

The extent to which the governance mechanisms are used for supporting compliance, transparency and accountability of program decisions and expenditure in line with the DFA is mixed and requires strengthening. While Joint Annual Reviews and budget meetings are taking place, quarterly finance meetings have not taken place since 2017. This is concerning, given their key role in reviewing procurement plans, annual budgets ³²and informing tentative decisions on budget prior to the joint budget meeting between the parties in August/September. However, the reviewers understand that while this is the case, regular meetings are convened between DFAT and the MEHRD Senior Management Team to agree on future budget spends and to discuss program issues as they arise.

The extent to which draft procurement plans and risk management are discussed at those meetings is unclear³³. The absence of specific reporting on program wide risk ³⁴and procurement in MEHRD's 2017 Annual Review report suggests a potential disconnect between governance arrangements articulated in the DFA and practice, it may also indicate that there is a low level of ownership over the Program Risk Management Plan. However, MEHRD reports on implementation risks in its quarterly progress reports.

In the absence of clear accountabilities for progress reporting requirements by SIG (aside from annual planning budget requirements) the governance reporting requirements as articulated in the DFA appear to be donor driven. This likely reflects the post-conflict context in which the historical SWAp in education had been designed and were necessary at the time because of the highly fragile and weak administrative systems. Governance arrangements as outlined in the DFA are still relevant but closer attention to their implementation is required.

³¹ DFA clause 74-89 and Annex 3 provides an overview of the Annual Program Budget and Governance Management cycle

³² Annex 5 DFA Program procurement Management Procedures clause 2 pg39 "Procurement Plans will be presented annually to Development Partners for review in accordance with the annual budget in the first Finance Committee meeting of the year"

³³ Refer to draft 2017 Procurement Assessment for details on procurement and recommendations.

³⁴ Refer Annex 7 – Program Risk Management Plan

The joint mid-term review as it stands is specifically focussed on MEHRD performance against the PLA matrix which in-turn is used to inform MEHRD's budget proposal for the following fiscal year. The Joint Annual Review process promotes transparency by MEHRD reporting back to its stakeholders on NEAP implementation as well as using feed-back from that forum to inform future planning. The Donor Coordination Mechanism is primarily used for information sharing and could be better utilised to feed into MERHD Annual Work Planning Process.

Delivery Finding 4 - Parallel projects directly supported by DFAT have delivered tangible results and are addressing gaps in early years learning. While this is the case, this has placed additional administrative burdens on Post.

Over the life of the Program both DFAT and MFAT have employed the use of parallel systems to support MEHRD to realise aspects of its NEAP. DFAT support has been beneficial, particularly in assisting with reforms in MEHRD's Asset Management Division to address capacity constraints. In 2015-16 DFAT directly contracted GW Associates to assist AMD with architectural and construction management services. GW Associates played a critical intermediary role between MEHRD and construction contractors and monitored school infrastructure projects. GW Associates were also able to build momentum for school infrastructure and were able to work effectively in isolated areas. While the reviewers were unable to source information on the work of Alexander and Lloyd, consultations revealed that support has been highly valued as has been DFAT's flexibility and responsiveness in this regard.

DFAT's support to Save the Children in Choiseul and its program with Literacy Boost worked with hard to reach communities to look at aspects of school readiness and pre-literacy.

While the use of parallel systems outside the SWAp has transferred administrative transactional costs to AHC, there were indications that the benefits of using parallel financing ensure support is directly reaching those who most need it (schools and children) in an efficient manner and in our view this outweighs the burden of administrative time. The current use of parallel support is an appropriate way of supplementing the SWAp given the challenges associated with efficacy of the MEHRD/SIG system.

Delivery Finding 5 - While communication and alignment between various programs within AHC is strong at the individual level, greater opportunities to leverage benefits across programs could be made use of.

The governance program has potential to support the decentralisation aspects of the education program since its program has staff placed directly in the provinces.

A further opportunity for alignment exists across the education programs themselves. The intent of the design of ESP2 was extremely worthy in trying to ensure a whole of sector approach to education including basic education, skills for economic growth, scholarships as

well as management. However, the various parts of the education program e.g. TVET and ESP have the potential to be better integrated through the provision of pathways for younger people into TVET programs.

Delivery Finding 5 - The MEHRD Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan is easy to follow and has significant buy-in from the Ministry. In terms of separate M and E for the program, there is a yearly assessment. This mid-term review is also designed to provide information related to the program to inform future decision making.

There was a rudimentary M & E framework attached to the design with a specification that a fuller framework should be developed shortly after inception of the program once the M & E adviser had come into place. However, the M & E adviser did not arrive until 2017 and his ToRs did not reference the M&E framework in the design, making the strengthening of MEHRD systems his key priority. As part of his work he supported MEHRD in developing a solid MEL plan including specific indicators based on the NEAP which includes frequency of data collection and individual and collective responsibilities. The PLA indicators and the PAF further strengthen the M and E.

5.6. Cross-Cutting Issues

In terms of cross-cutting issues, we looked at gender, disabilities, children from diverse backgrounds including the very poor as well as child protection.

5.6.1. Gender

In terms of access, the gender parity index at primary level and junior secondary level has stayed fairly static with a slight favouring of enrolment of boys (0.93 in primary). However, the GPI at junior secondary has improved to a perfect score of 1, possibly due to the fact that the program has built WASH facilities for girls

The original design is sound in terms of making provision for gender equity. The curriculum materials are explicitly gender neutral with an avoidance of stereotypes, equal numbers of male and female characters in stories and both boys and girls portrayed in non stereotyped jobs and activities (Bakolo et al. 2016).

Other indications are anecdotal and our findings based on individual interviews and visits. Communities interviewed were made up of approximately the same number of males and females with the women. In interviews with children, girls were generally more vocal than boys. We encountered women in leadership roles. A female school director talked about how she had been successful in becoming a head teacher, some of the problems she had with parents in her position as a school leader and how she was trying to empower other

teachers to take on positions of responsibility. In Rennell, a gender desk officer had been employed within the EA.

5.6.2. Disability

A National Disability Inclusive Education Policy was drafted in 2016 and progress is being made to improve disability data quality in SIEMIS. (MEHRD 2016).. School leaders who had attended the program-funded training reported that inclusive education and disability formed part of their studies..

5.6.3. Children from diverse backgrounds

Reviewers found the barriers to access identified in the study of 2010 still largely held, with distance, OTL factors and cost still hindering access. The social effects of mining and logging in Central Province and in Rennell were additional issues. On Rennell, we heard of the exploitation of both boys and girls through these activities with job opportunities for boys as young as 10 enticing them to leave education and sexual exploitation of girls. Teachers reported trying to combat this issue by making children aware of the transient nature of such opportunities in contrast to the lasting benefits associated with education.

5.6.4. Child Protection

Child protection remains an issue with children in the focus groups reporting instances of physical and verbal abuse. MEHRD is responding with a child protection policy.

The review team were unable to source data related to the environmental impact of the program.

6. Recommendations and Future

This section looks at recommendations based on findings.

Recommendation 1

The current delivery approach which includes direct budget support and parallel support should continue into the next phase of the program. MEHRD should be helped with spend through: 1) provision of TA specific to capacity building in procurement and PFM, 2) outsourcing where possible and increased use of larger contracts 3) provision of a clear, easy to use operating manual for MEHRD staff on procurement and PFM processes.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that the system of budget support is aligned with best practice. It represents the only practicable way of reaching all schools in the country and means that despite only contributing 5% of the budget, Australia is better positioned to enter into dialogue with SIG. Our findings show that the current process contains sufficient safeguards to Australian investment in the sector.

Recommendation 2

Linked to the above recommendation, partners should continue with current PFM and Procurement Advisers and consider supplementing these with an advisor/s whose sole purpose is to strengthen capacity in a facilitative rather than compliance role. In the future, advisors should also work closely with corporate services to help develop the appropriate sections of its planned standard operating manual so that the procedures contained in the manual are clearly understood and owned by MEHRD staff.

Our recommendations are based on reported difficulties in understanding some financial and procurement procedures. While TA in Finance and Procurement are assisting MEHRD to monitor and manage fiduciary risk, the emphasis on helping staff with spend could be strengthened.

Recommendation 3

AHC maintains its use of parallel support mechanisms into the next phase and considers expanding support through this modality to high poverty regions (Honiara, Makira, Guadalcanal) identified in the 2012 – 2013 Household Income and Expenditure Survey as areas of greatest vulnerability and poverty.

Our recommendations are based on findings that the modality of sub-contracting e.g. to companies has worked well in areas such as curriculum. Information from both interview respondents as well as broader document analysis also appears to indicate that this modality is suitable to pilots which can then later be expanded to other provinces.

Recommendation 4

MEHRD should continue with its outsourcing especially in the area of larger contracts and pilots.

Our recommendations are based on findings that the modality of sub-contracting e.g. to companies has worked well in areas such as curriculum. Information from both interview respondents as well as broader document analysis also appears to indicate that this modality is suitable to pilots which can be expanded to other provinces.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that for the next phase of design, AHC consider amending the DFA to reflect AHC funded components of the NEAP as reflected in MEHRDs Annual Work Plan.

Our recommendation is based on the fact that it has been difficult for us to track whether program activities have been delivered to agreed time frames and to budget as specified in our ToRs since the design is not fully referenced in the DFA. Further the independent review is premised on assessing progress towards intended outcomes; these are articulated in the design document. To ensure that future reviews are clear about expected benchmarks in which performance is being assessed, it is therefore necessary for a design to be adequately reflected in a DFA as a key accountability document.³⁵

Recommendation 6

DFA key governance arrangements, functions, responsibilities and expected frequency of meetings should if necessary be reviewed and adhered to.

This recommendation is based on our review of governance arrangements which consist of quarterly finance and audit meetings, joint reviews, an Education Development Partners Coordination Group (EDPCG), and a joint budget review. There is also a requirement for risk management and reporting by MEHRD although this is not reflected in its current quarterly and annual reporting.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that AHC in consultation with NZHC and MEHRD ensures that the design process reviews the current governance, management and evaluation arrangements for the continuation of the program with a view to transitioning it from separate Australian and New Zealand mechanisms (e.g. separate reviews, designs, reporting mechanisms) towards a broader based approach aligned around the NEAP to drive accountability and transparency.

Our recommendation is based on reports that separate mechanisms are placing increased transactional costs on MEHRD.

Recommendation 8

In terms of technical focus, it is recommended that a) the next phase of the program should continue to focus on basic education and continue to pursue the key high level goals of the program.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that the majority of children enrolled in school are enrolled in Years 1 – 9 with basic education accounting for 76% of the entire student population. The fact that 70% of them leave school before they finish Year 9 demonstrates the amount of work still left in this sub-sector.

Recommendation 9

The next design team should consider continuing with a focus on literacy (in its broadest sense) and numeracy in basic education and b) gradually increase focus on the higher levels of basic education (junior secondary) c) ECE could be addressed at the policy level d) Consideration could also be given to focusing on integrating TVET with general provision in the sector at both junior secondary and senior secondary level. e) The definition of literacy could be expanded to include aspects of financial literacy. f) The curriculum plan to 2025 should be followed to ensure that all materials including

³⁵ Note: Other components of the ESP were referenced more fully in the DFA

student materials and teacher guides are completed g) Greater support could be given to EAs to enable them, in turn, to support schools and children.

Our recommendations are based on our findings that, key goals and assumptions still hold true in relation to basic education and literacy and numeracy since gains made to date need to be sustained but that the next phase of the program should also consider other areas which emerged as a priority during our review

Recommendation 10

Linked to the recommendation above, it is recommended that during the next phase, the program consider including some of the areas which were planned for the original eight-year window of the program e.g. review of textbook delivery chain, some aspects of school grants, innovation grants to EAs. A detailed comparison of the original design with activities as tracked through MEHRD documentation is contained in Annex E. We have also highlighted activities which did not happen but which should be considered by the new design team.

Our recommendations are based on our findings that some of these activities are still relevant. Activities which did not take place or which have been delayed include a focus on numeracy which was due to happen in the second year of the program. Other areas were a review of the platform for SIEMIS, a more in-depth focus on the work of the Inspectorate, more targeted work with EAs (beyond the grants provided by MFAT), specific activities to help the most vulnerable and broader support for decentralization.

Recommendation 11

It is recommended that for the next phase of the program more focus is placed on the EA level using a range of strategies to be identified by the design team including by leveraging aspects of the AHC governance program.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that while currently the MEHRD is well resourced, EAs lack the financial resources and capacity to deliver their programs despite the fact that they have a key role to play in supporting schools. The governance program within AHC has good reach in the provinces and has there is the potential for the two programs to work more closely together to support work at deconcentrated level in the provinces.

Recommendation 12

During the next phase of the program, ensure a focus on the basic opportunities to learn (OTL) exists as a prerequisite for other interventions³⁶.

Our recommendations are based on our findings that in the original design the existence of OTL was an assumption in the Theory of Change. OTL includes schools being open every day of the school year and every hour of the school day, teachers being in school and teaching, children being in school, sufficient resources being available etc.. The next design could consider lessons from other regions in this area e.g. teacher codes of conduct, discipline laws etc.

Recommendation 13

³⁶ See Annex H for a fuller discussion of OTL

During the next phase of the program, it is recommended that partners consider balancing TA investments to areas that provide a direct line of sight to the classroom while at the same time retaining and embedding current system reforms within MEHRD

Our recommendation is based on the finding that over the course of the program, TA have been concentrated in key priority areas in particular in Component D. This has had a marked effect on the strengthening of the system but attention also needs to be paid to the classroom level where the time lapse between investment and learning outcomes can take much longer.

Recommendation 14

As soon as is feasible, AHC should assist MEHRD to ensure that it has copyright of materials produced on its behalf and is able to use these materials to adapt, modify or turn into digital content. In the longer term, the AHC should also assist MEHRD with procurement and contract negotiations so they are not disadvantaged in the way they have been in relation to text books.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that Pearson publishers still hold the intellectual property rights to materials produced under Nguzu Nguzu. This is atypical for a contract of this nature and means that plans to make the content of e.g. Teacher's Guides available on personal Smart Phones in PDF format is currently not possible.

Recommendation 15

Linked to the above, development partners should consider assisting SIEMIS staff to review whether the current platform of PINEAPPLE is the most appropriate to their needs.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that while SIEMIS provides excellent data to inform decision making, information from interviews showed that currently in order to make small changes to EMIS, expensive external help needs to be sought. The staff working in SIEMIS are talented and capable of managing their own EMIS system.

Recommendation 16

AHC and NZHC should work together where possible, engage in joint meetings and should conduct joint reviews to ensure that the transactional cost on MEHRD is lessened. In particular, the upcoming MFAT review should build on the work of the current mid-term review. The upcoming design should involve both Australia and New Zealand to allow for a more harmonised approach.

Our recommendation is based on the finding that MEHRD felt that the number of reviews asking similar questions added to their work. Although AHC and NHZ are working closely together on a day-to-day basis, some of the activities of NHZ appeared to be siloed.

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Preliminary Recommendations for the design

- The DPs should have a joint design and a joint financing agreement that supports implementation of the NEAP. However, if the design is joint this has implications for the timing since MFAT's mid-term review would need to happen prior to this phase
- There are some evidence gaps which could usefully be addressed either before or during the next design. These include some areas identified by the team as well as

feedback received on earlier drafts of this report which requested additional information which fell outside the scope of the review. Examples are

- more in-depth investigation into literacy to look at how well the various approaches to literacy align³⁷ as well as related issues such as teachers' and children's overall language skills
- examination of the realistic potential for the use of targeted grants.
- a review of good models for outsourcing and parallel programs which have proved successful in other parts of the world.
- Partners could consider a more participatory approach to the design by including someone from Government (e.g. SSU) on team and / or a representative of EAs.
- The current approach to independent verification of performance indicators should be reviewed and ensure a consistent approach is used over the life of the future program. This should include ensuring that a clear process for verification is set out, draws on MEHRD MEL high level and intermediate outcomes and consider how to avoid the current perceived penalization approach.
- The design team should visit provinces visited by the MTR team.
- The design must include an evaluation design identifying approach, methodology and timings and specifying key baselines, reviews, data collection etc.
- The design should respect the regulations of MDPAC in relation to mission timing or ensure that donors are seen to be supporting SIG policy despite the fact that such a policy may not be adhered to by others.
- The design should review how greater links and cohesion between the education sector SWAp and Australia's efforts in the Governance program (support to MoFT and Public Service) could be strengthened to ensure that Australia's governance strengthening efforts are in turn strengthening its investments in education.
- The design should continue in the area of basic education but should focus on locally defined problems (as opposed to transplanting pre-conceived and packaged best practice solutions from other contexts).
- The next phase should consider the activities which were originally envisaged but were postponed (These are highlighted in Annex E).

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Annexes to MTR Report

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