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INDEPENDENT PROGRESS REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The *Support for Philippine Basic Education Reform* (SPHERE) has been designed as a parallel grant program building on, and complementing, the World Bank's National Program Support to Basic Education (NPSBE). Both SPHERE and NPSBE assist the Department of Education's (DepED) implementation of its Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) which aims to achieve improved quality and equity in learning outcomes among Filipino children.

Review Findings

1. Relevance

The SPHERE program is highly relevant, focuses on significant areas of the BESRA and specifically addresses both upstream as well as downstream key priority areas for DepED in ways consistent with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. SPHERE also addresses AusAID priorities for Education sector funding. These include a strong focus on BESRA components likely to lead to improved learning outcomes; support for GoP efforts to attain EFA and MDG targets; and support to address issues of equity and inclusion.

2. Effectiveness

Progress is noted in SPHERE supported initiatives, particularly in school construction and provision of Technical Assistance. In addition, the structures designed to progress reform (Technical Working Groups), have developed important policy actions and implementation frameworks, usually with inputs drawn from sub-national levels, and have produced training materials and resources, complemented by some downstream training, for example in School Based Management. However, overall progress, particularly in SBM grants, TA provision, LRMDs and teaching-learning materials provision, has been delayed, including by slow disbursement of funds.

3. Efficiency

The use of SPHERE funds has resulted in development of policy frameworks and implementation strategies, and the conduct of training programs across all levels of the system. However, significant delays in disbursement of funds, in approvals of key policy instruments, and in TWG activities, suggest that important areas of inefficiency need to be addressed. In addition, the successful initiatives from earlier projects such as BEAM and more recently, STRIVE do not appear to have been sufficiently integrated and utilised to inform a more efficient sequencing of support to different regions and divisions, according to their level of achievement.

4. Sustainability

The recognition that SPHERE is embedded in government systems, feedback from review processes is being utilised and there is evidence of increased ownership of BESRA at all levels of the education sector indicates good progress towards sustainability. However, further progress requires that the various initiatives funded under SPHERE are integrated into the work of organic units and this has been delayed. Other threats to sustainability include delays in addressing capacity 'gaps' at region, division and school levels, and delays in developing and implementing an advocacy program.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Significant work has been done in developing the QAA and QMS, and the M&E system is in place and collecting appropriate data which is consolidated at central

level and reported back to regional and divisional levels. Both structures are consistent with AusAID requirements. Delays in approval of the QAAF have, however, delayed implementation in the seven regions selected for modelling of the process. A refocussing of implementation of the QMS to address different levels of capacity and development, particularly in SBM, will allow acceleration in regions/divisions where progress has been good, which will permit 'showcasing' of that practice.

6. Gender Equality:

SPHERE has two sets of outcome indicators measuring (i) participation and completion, and (ii) quality and efficiency that are expected to be disaggregated by sex and other variables. It has contributed to the narrowing of gender gaps in education outcomes, particularly in the modest improvement in the boys' school performance. Although SPHERE has no gender strategy, it indirectly supports gender mainstreaming by DepED by observing its processes and systems. It is rated as "gender-sensitive" (12.75)¹², but the IPR Team noted several areas that can be improved. These include analysis of factors that drive the gender differences in school access, performance and achievement; and formulation of plans and strategies at school, division, region, and Central Office levels to respond to needs and concerns of female and male learners and teachers. These also include the provision of separate toilets with running water in schools that have had structures constructed with SPHERE support.

7. Analysis and Learning

The program is based upon sound technical advice and a process of continuous learning, informed by a series of semi-annual reviews, usually conducted jointly with the World Bank, as manager of the Trust Fund. Whilst DepED also seeks to adjust the BESRA planning and implementation based upon feedback from reviews and experience gained in previous projects and programs, the IPR team suggests that DepED does not yet have sufficient capacity in key areas necessary to fully analyse data and document good experiences, and adjust targets and programs. We noted also that there is a lack of overall coordination of TWG efforts; efforts which whilst noteworthy in many cases, would be more effective if better coordinated and integrated. The recently approved BIAP will provide an important 'roadmap' for increasing the rate of reform, and could be complemented by the appointment of a senior DepED staff member with dedicated responsibility for 'driving' the reform.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendation 1: AusAID considers a concentration of funding on central core level structures and functions of DepED in order to strengthen and ensure continuity of reform in important areas such as strategic planning, financial management and change management.

Recommendation 2: AusAID engages with the WB to seek ways to jointly engage with DepED and support development of enhanced capacity for

¹ Based on the Harmonised GAD guidelines

strategic planning, enhanced financial management and effective change management.

Recommendation 3: that AusAID continues to engage with DepED to seek an accelerated disbursement of pending SPHERE funds and continuation of its efforts to address and correct current bottlenecks in fund disbursement.

Recommendation 4: that AusAID actively encourages DepED to use SPHERE resources for a gender-focused TA that would help build capacities for gender analysis and planning at different levels and for BESRA TWGs to identify and address key gender issues, including the provision of separate toilets with running water as part of SPHERE classroom construction support

Recommendation 5: that as part of discussions concerning the DepED request for reprogramming of SPHERE resources, AusAID engages with DepED U/Sec (Programs & Planning) to agree on a realignment of SPHERE resources to best address the most effective phasing of interventions, and to ensure an acceleration of implementation within the remaining period of the SPHERE grant.

EVALUATION CRITERIA RATINGS (Overall Rating: 4)

Criterion	Rating	Justification
Relevance	5	The SPHERE program is highly relevant, focuses on significant areas of the BESRA and specifically addresses both upstream as well as downstream key priority areas for DepED in ways consistent with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. SPHERE also addresses AusAID priorities for Education sector funding.
Effectiveness	4	SPHERE has supported TAs to help develop policies, standards and implementation frameworks. There is good progress in school construction, modest progress against other output indicators, and the beginnings of Regional Office restructuring in STRIVE regions. Volume and breadth of reform initiatives constrain depth and institutionalisation of new practices and procedures.
Efficiency	3	Training of key personnel has taken place across various functional responsibilities, consistent with policy initiatives. TA has been engaged as appropriate. School construction is 95% completed. Capacity 'gaps' constrain efficiency especially in financial management. While there have also been efforts to address bottlenecks, very low disbursements and implementation delays continue to hamper efficient delivery.
Sustainability	4	SPHERE is embedded in government systems and feedback from review processes is being utilised, including to improve financial management. Demonstrated commitment to reform is evident in DepED, however, progress is constrained by slow delivery and delayed approval of key policies/processes eg: the Rationalisation Plan.
Gender Equality	4	SPHERE is supporting DepED processes and initiatives that aim to address gender disparity issues. However, planning is not sufficiently informed by data analysis of gender disparities in education outcomes, including for school design, especially latrine provision.
Monitoring & Evaluation	4	An M&E System is in place to collect appropriate data, including sex-disaggregated outcome indicators, and to provide feedback to personnel at all levels of the system. QAAF/QMS have been developed, trainings conducted across organic units, and QMS system being trialled. However, a narrow focus on output indicators and on compliance, a lack of logistical support for monitoring, constrains conduct of effective M&E outside the Central Office. Capacity building in M&E is not demand driven, causing some training in M&E to occur in advance of the implementation of the initiative to be measured (e.g. SIP formulation)
Analysis and Learning	4	SPHERE is based on sound technical analysis. It pursues key areas identified from AusAID and other ODA projects. Issues identified during semi-annual reviews have resulted in some changes. By supporting the GoP reform agenda, systems and processes, SPHERE implementation is in line with Australian commitment to both the Paris Declaration and the Accra Accord. However, there is insufficient use of project reviews, analysis and lessons learnt.

Rating scale: 6 = very high quality; 1 = very low quality. Below 4 is less than satisfactory.

INTRODUCTION

Activity Background

History

The *Support for Philippine Basic Education Reform* (SPHERE) has been designed as a parallel grant program building on, and complementing, the World Bank's National Program Support to Basic Education (NPSBE). Both SPHERE and NPSBE assist the Department of Education's (DepED) implementation of its Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) which aims to achieve improved quality and equity in learning outcomes among Filipino children.

SPHERE funds of \$A41.0 million are being delivered via a Trust Fund managed by the World Bank. The Administration Agreement, between AusAID as the donor and the World Bank as the Trust Fund Administrator, was signed on 31 July 2007 while the Grant Agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the World Bank, as Trust Fund Administrator, was signed on 27 March 2008. SPHERE became effective on 20 June 2008. The Grant closing date is 30 June 2011.

The provision of SPHERE demonstrates AusAID's shift in program delivery from stand alone projects at sub-national levels to national level system wide reform initiatives. The partnership established with the World Bank illustrates Australia's commitment to the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action on aid effectiveness.

SPHERE provides additional financing and technical support to BESRA in areas that complement the NPSBE components. The NPSBE components are: Strengthened School-Based Management; Improved Teaching Effectiveness; Enhanced Quality and Equity through Standards, Assessment and Support; and Effective Resource Mobilization.

SPHERE is supporting a subset of activities and expenditures *distinct* from NPSBE through targeting the activities and expenditures not covered in the ongoing programs but which have additional needs in order to support the essential building blocks of the reform agenda.

In brief, *SPHERE* has three components:

1. **Translation of system-level policies into actions**
 - 1.1 Funding for short to medium term technical assistance (TA), to translate policy ideas on reform into action plans and to build the capacity of key DepED managers to implement and manage change in line with DepED reforms;
 - 1.2 Capacity building in regional offices by supporting them to undertake the quality assurance functions of monitoring progress in divisions and schools, delivering support as required, and providing feedback to them on their performance.
 - 1.3 Funding the construction or refurbishment of teaching and learning resource centres across the country, including ICT support.
2. **Support for School-Based Management through grants for school improvement plan**
3. **Classroom construction in high need locations in Southern Philippines**

The specific and measurable outputs to be produced from SPHERE are:

- A functioning Quality Assurance system established with stakeholder participation at regional level,
- Action Plans developed for key reform thrusts of BESRA,
- Increased number of schools implementing school based management in targeted divisions;
- Increased number of functional classrooms in targeted schools; and
- Increased utilization rate of DepED budget allocation.

This Independent Progress Review focuses on the 3 SPHERE components and will examine the progress of SPHERE's output in terms of these 5 specific areas.

Evaluation Objectives and Questions

The evaluation objectives of the IPR, and specific questions to be addressed, are included in Appendix 1

Evaluation Scope and Methods

The Evaluation Plan is attached as Appendix 2. It describes the methods used to conduct the review. A summary of the review methodology appears below:

- Analysis of key documents (BESRA, NPSBE, SPHERE and STRIVE) and reports provided by AusAID and DepED was undertaken, including those documents provided during field visits
- Field visits to Regions XII (General Santos) and VIII (Catarman) were completed from Feb 15-19³
- A series of Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in DepED at central level. The Program of consultations is attached as Appendix 3;
- A number of individual interviews were held with senior DepED personnel⁴
- Attended the 'kick-off' and final review meetings hosted by DepED
- Field visits were carried out accompanied by the World Bank Mid-Term Review Mission, as were the series of meetings with DepED CO (initial and concluding meetings, FGDs)⁵
- The mapping of key processes such as procurement and financial management
- Prepared a report summary and communicated preliminary findings to key stakeholders in a Wrap-Up meeting in DepED, followed by an AusAID internal Feedback and Learning session on the final day of the formal review period.

Assumptions:

- There would be reasonable access to stakeholders in order to address the questions that were prepared as part of the Evaluation Plan. However, most meetings were conducted as very large Focus Group Discussions rather than

³ Updated to include data from field visits to Regions 6, 7, and 12, and National Capital Region, conducted as part of the Resources Review-Phase 1, as well as that provided by DepED up to April 15, 2010

⁴ Updated to include data from additional interviews were conducted across all relevant organic units of DepED/CO as part of Phase 1 of the Resources Review

⁵ Field visits for Part 1 of the Resources Review were conducted as in individual mission

one-on-one interviews. In general terms the IPR team was at least able to consult with the key groups and units involved in SPHERE implementation

Limitations:

- Meetings with DepED teams, and field visits, were all conducted together with a large World Bank Review team. This limited access of the IPR team to ask more specific questions of particular individual officers responsible for SPHERE initiatives. In addition, meetings with DepED staff were dominated by formal presentations, with follow-up questions asked in a group setting⁶
- There was a difficulty in isolating the specific contribution and impact of SPHERE on BESRA, as distinct from contributions from NPSBE, STRIVE and BEAM. Many implementing personnel were unable to make the distinction between the different funding sources, especially at Divisional and School level;
- The IPR Team have been requested to award a single rating for performance against 8 specific criteria set by AusAID. As stated above, there is a mix of interventions influencing the progress of BESRA and so there is a methodological difficulty in us proposing this single rating in each criterion for SPHERE since we are not confident that it represents a valid score for SPHERE alone. Despite this difficulty, the rating given nevertheless represents consensus within the team.

Evaluation Team

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⁶ The Resources Review, Phase 1, enabled greater access to key informants.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

1. Relevance

The **Support to Philippines Basic Education Reforms** (SPHERE) program includes three key areas of support which are aligned directly with the Government of the Philippines (GoP) Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA), namely:

- **Strengthening GoP capacity to lead and manage reform through provision of technical assistance for policy development, and to build the capacity of the Department of Education (DepED) to implement and manage change in line with the overall BESRA reforms.** SPHERE support is designed to build the capacity at relevant levels of the Education system to assume responsibilities for reform and to build towards a system which is responsive, supportive and effective. Support focuses on provision of Technical Assistance to build capacity for policy development and implementation. Regional Offices have a critical role in providing TA for the Divisions but lack capacity for new roles and functions. Therefore provision of TA supports Regional Offices to undertake quality assurance functions; establish Teaching and Learning Resource Centres across the country, including ICT support for quality assurance functions, improve teaching and learning and assessment.
- **Delivering support through mechanisms designed to increase accountabilities and deepen partnerships with civil society partners through support for School-Based Management (SBM) through provision of SBM grants.** The SPHERE focuses clearly on supporting “scale-up” of successful outputs from previous and current projects into broad and sustainable outcomes for Basic Education delivery across the Philippines. Strengthening capacity at school level is also consistent with the overall objectives of BESRA which place schools at the centre of reform efforts.
- **Addressing critical factors influencing access to a quality elementary education.** SPHERE specifically addresses the availability of school classrooms through the construction program in identified priority schools in the Southern Philippines under the Department of Education-managed School Building Program.
- The implementation of the principal-led scheme where the Principal/School Heads were actively involved in the various phases of the implementation of School Building Program (SBP) is consistent with the SBM focus of BESRA.
- **Overall**, the program therefore remains highly relevant to both GoA and GoP commitments to develop a coherent program of support for a strategic system-wide engagement in policy development and implementation. SPHERE also addresses AusAID priorities for Education sector funding, namely a strong focus BESRA components likely to lead to improved learning outcomes, to support GoP efforts to attain EFA and MDG targets, and address issues of equity and inclusion. The program supports the multi-level approach adopted for BESRA with the Central Office dealing with system design (policy, standards, and frameworks); the Regional Office with Support Systems and QA (M&E, TA, and Training); the Division Office with operational initiatives including QA and the school on implementation.

The IPR team considers that SPHERE funding is likely to contribute significantly to BESRA implementation. The use of a flexible program approach, embedded within DepED, directly addresses the intentions of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda

for Action. Finally, working through a Trust Fund arrangement administered by the World Bank has merit. However, significant delays in disbursements, as well as organisational capacity and resource constraints, present a serious risk to full utilisation of the SPHERE funding. In this respect, the Resources Review has provided an important opportunity to examine more closely the financial management 'bottlenecks' which are presently hindering progress.

The IPR team also considers this to be a critical point in implementation and an opportunity for strategic analysis and refocussing of SPHERE components to ensure greater integration of the various initiatives and the capturing of lessons learnt, especially from previous/ current projects (including TEEP, SEDIP, BEAM, STRIVE). It also affords an opportunity to review prevailing challenges to implementation and to make agreed adjustments with DepED where these are feasible.

2. Effectiveness

Consistent with the observations of the most recent 2009 Joint Implementation Review Missions (February and September)⁷ the IPR Team found that there has been considerable progress since BESRA commenced in mid-2006, and recognises that the magnitude and complexity of the reform agenda is likely to require time to take root. Meetings at Central Level during the IPR confirmed the earlier observations regarding an increase in confidence, ownership and achievements of the various TWGs tasked with responsibility for development of policies and implementation arrangements in the functional areas of BESRA reform under their responsibility. The BESRA Implementation and Accountability Plan (BIAP), has been approved recently by the Secretary DepED and now provides an important basis for accelerating the progress of reform.

Component 1: Translation of system-level policies into action

- SPHERE support has enabled development of policies and implementation frameworks, though implementation has been delayed by several factors, including slow disbursements. Evidence indicates that the DepED initiatives, for example SBM, have developed to a level where they are likely to bear fruit once the BIAP is implemented, resource flows increase and the requisite capacities developed at relevant levels in the system.
- TA has been utilised in areas of relevance to BESRA with 23 consultants recruited up to December 2009. There is also evidence that TA/Technical support staff play an important role as drivers/supporters of change and integration⁸. Overall, 20 (39%) of a target 51 policy actions are being implemented, with a further 9(18%) awaiting final approval before implementation can commence.
- Provision of TA has resulted in development of policies in key areas of reform and the preparation/finalisation of various implementation 'tools', including training materials and modules. The finalisation of the QAAF including the QAA and QMS tools is important since, once approved and implemented, it will complement an array of significant initiatives and provide an important basis for a cultural shift towards evidence-based planning, enhanced evaluation and performance-based assessment and recruitment. However, policy planning could be better informed

⁷ Fourth Joint Implementation Review Mission, Feb 16 to 27, 2009, Aide Memoire; Fifth Joint Implementation Review Mission, August 3 to 14, 2009, Aide Memoire.

⁸ End of Contract Report, Ali Douglas

by feedback from more detailed data analysis (especially in cross-cutting areas such as gender).

- Significant changes in perceptions about reform are required across the system. Training events being used to build capacity emphasise a “transmission of information” model, and the subsequent monitoring is too focussed on compliance with expectations.
- The role of the TWGs to generate well prepared policy and activity proposals for endorsement by the TCT to senior DepED management for final approval has been successful. . EDPITAF has fulfilled its designated role to provide secretariat support and mobilise appropriate resources for the administrative and financial support needed for TCT and TWG activities.
- However, the IPR Team suggests that changes are now needed to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation process. For example, the TCT has met infrequently resulting in limited coordination and integration of TWG initiatives and interlinked activities. This means that TWGs have assumed implementation responsibilities resulting in an apparently uncoordinated roll-out of activities across the regions. It is therefore suggested that the work of the TWGs should now be integrated into the work of the organic units in order to foster both sustainability and “transfer of technology”.

Component 2: Support for School-Based Management through grants for school improvement plans

- Progress has been made in development of policy instruments and implementation frameworks related to SBM. However, the IPR Team noted that the BEAM, SEDIP and TEEP projects each had very strong components of SBM, and that much important groundwork had been laid, including the stages in preparation of School Improvement Plans (SIP), with extensive training programs conducted under each of these projects. The majority of public elementary schools now have SIPs and these are used as part of overall school and divisional planning, although these vary considerably in quality. It may therefore be more useful to refocus SBM efforts on training school personnel in Quality Assurance processes that could improve SIP quality as well as the development process..
- It was evident from (albeit limited) field visits that many SIPs are prepared simply to comply with DO and RO requirements rather than on the basis of understandings about the central role the SIP might play in overall school development and improvement of school outcomes. This is not surprising at this stage of the reform process but does point up the need to refocus training and advocacy efforts to support the role of SIPs as central to SBM.
- The National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (Schools have received a Primer and copies of materials for teachers that are expected to be reproduced at school level and distributed to teachers. The delivery of the Toolkits has, however, been delayed. This material was conceived as a means for teachers to look more closely at their own practices (self appraisal), to identify areas in which they require more training, and to reflect on how their teaching was promoting learning progress in their classrooms. It was proposed that the NCBTS would be incorporated in the SIP as a key element for teacher development planning in SIP, DEDP and REDP levels.
- This changed approach to “self-appraisal” has not yet been sufficiently disseminated in the system, and it has now been complicated by a new emphasis

on the use of CBTS as a structure for teacher assessment for accountability. There is therefore, a potential conflict between NCBTS as a mechanism to improve teaching and as the mechanism for teacher assessment which may diminish the usefulness of CBTS as a professional development tool.

- It was also evident from field visits that issues of workload at DO and school level, a lack of administrative support for elementary schools, and an insufficient capacity for educational leadership at Principal level, needs to be addressed as part of SBM strengthening. Similarly, workload appears to be impacting negatively on the capacity of School Supervisors and School Principals, both central to improving teaching practice, to exercise their coach or mentoring role..
- It was also evident from field visits that, whilst there is evidence of community interest and willingness to engage in school activities and assist with the school operation as part of the SBM process, School Governing Councils (SGCs) have not yet been formed, or are not yet functioning in large numbers. This suggests that implementation of SBM may more usefully review the existing capacity of the various parent-teacher bodies and to assist with a transition from these to full SGCs once understandings and capacities have been developed.
- Overall, whilst project support has been directed to capacity building at school level, there is a serious doubt about the capacity of schools to meet targets in SBM given their present staffing levels and work-loads.

Component 3: Classroom construction in high need locations in Southern Philippines

- Progress against this component has been good with 95.7% of school construction completed. The Principal-led element of the programme has been enhanced through the distribution of an Operations Manual, a CD on construction activities and the conduct of hands-on trainings of Principal/School Heads in the procurement of SBP. In order to expedite procurement of school furniture, responsibility was delegated to Division level. However, approximately 60% of the allocation for classroom furniture has been contracted, and 27% of procurement completed. DepED/PFSED advised that procurement is proceeding in all target divisions, with the exception of Regions 7 and 12, where the RO assumed responsibility for procurement and, in both cases, bidding had failed and had to be restarted.
- The IPR team visited a number of schools in Regions VIII and XII⁹ where new classrooms had been completed and it was clearly evident that teachers, parents and students appreciated the additional building. There was also some evidence that the increased classroom space had resulted in a lower teacher-student ratio in the school¹⁰, but further analysis is required to assess whether this pattern is repeated across all schools receiving SPHERE support.
- It was noted that school building design and quality of construction are generally acceptable. However, the criteria for selection of recipient schools

⁹ Findings confirmed during Resources Review team visits to Regions 6, 7 and 12

¹⁰ Habitat Elementary School /Region VIII/Division General Santos: T-P ratio reduced from 1:100 – 1:80

Bawing Elementary School Extension/Regional XII/ Division General Santos: T-P ratio reduced from 1:94 – 1:69

for classroom construction need to be re-evaluated. Further, the Principal-led approach was evident in the selection of building sites within the campus, as well as oversight of the tender process. Tender processes for classroom construction and classroom furniture are generally effective (see Appendix 5 School Construction Assessment)

Conclusions

- SPHERE is achieving some of its stated objectives, but slow funding disbursement has significantly affecting delivery against program objectives
- The considerable interest and capacity existing in many regions, divisions and schools needs to be capitalised upon since the essential building blocks for effective SBM implementation are now in place
- However, despite the interest and enthusiasm, there is still a lack of capacity to implement reforms at RO, DO and school level but the lack of capacity is very variable across the regions. The reform agenda remains centrally driven. A review of the capacity currently existing at RO and DO levels, and in implementing schools is needed, along with a review of the effectiveness of present approaches to capacity building at sub-national levels.
- The performance against key outcome indicators is generally higher, and DepED has reported modest increases in Participation Rate at elementary level, although in general targets were not being met. An increase in NAT scores may indicate positive qualitative changes in classroom teaching and learning but, given the slow disbursement of funds, achievements against performance indicators could not be attributed to SPHERE, with the exception of TA and provision of additional buildings. The IPR team felt that a more detailed analysis of available data was necessary, particularly looking more closely at Divisions receiving SBM grants and school buildings, before it would be possible to assess the extent to which SPHERE funds had contributed to performance indicators.
- The effectiveness of training program for key personnel can be greatly enhanced by emphasising outcomes in the training plan, use of learner-centred approaches, and ensure a focus on continuous learning models and approaches.
- TA needs to be refocused on priority areas with an enhanced coordination of TAs to maximise integration, capitalise on synergies and minimise duplication
- More advocacy of the link between a CBTS and the SIP to show how CBTS can contribute to the planning for teacher development at school, Division and Regional level.

3. Efficiency¹¹

Consistent with reports from BESRA Joint Review Missions, the IPR and Resources Review team observed a number of concerns regarding the efficiency with which SPHERE resources have been utilised. It is expected that only 37%¹² of a total

¹¹ This section incorporates the main findings of the Resources Review Phase 1. Readers are referred to the full Report for the detailed SPHERE effectiveness analysis

¹² Based upon DepED reports to the Resources Review team

\$A41M has been expended to date despite 70% of the SPHERE implementation period having elapsed. The following summarises observations concerning efficiency with respect to each SPHERE component, followed by overall observations of the apparent causes of delayed disbursements and implementation.

Component 1: Translation of system-level policies into action

- **At Central level:** DepED reported that 23¹³ local contractors had been recruited to provide TA (as at end December, 2009) under the TA provisions of the SPHERE grant and most had completed their work at the time of reporting. An additional 12 Technical Assistance Support Staff has also been recruited. DepED also reported that they had been instrumental in assisting TWGs to complete 37, of a planned 51 'policy actions', at least to draft approval stage. The delays in recruitment appear to have resulted from weak capacity in DepED/CO in the development of ToRs, and the absence of efficient coordination between responsible units within DepED/CO. One consequence of this delay was the use of STRIVE project staff to assist in 'gap-filling' as well as in the development of ToRs.
- As noted under **Effectiveness** above, the efficient delivery of SPHERE resources, especially TA, relies upon the extent to which the structures of reform are working optimally. The IPR team observed that the members of the TWG's also have several other responsibilities and accountabilities to the organic units from which they come; secretariat support for TWGs is drawn from organic units who appear to view this as an additional responsibility for which they have not received human resource support; and there is limited membership from regional level which tends to encourage a unidirectional flow of information.
- Commitment to reform is evident in DepED at central and regional level, particularly amongst middle level managers, but reform is being addressed through a number of 'loosely coupled' structures (TWGs) in the absence of an effective mechanism to ensure overall coordination and integration of the often good efforts of individual TWGs. This point has been made in previous reviews.
- The agenda of the TWGs has been ambitious and important achievements have been made. However, the IPR team suggests that the efficiency of the TWGs may be weakened by the competing responsibilities and accountabilities of their members. Given ambitious targets, a refocusing on areas of maximum leverage, and a full implementation of the role of 'lead' TWG's such as SBM and ALS, may address current delays the progressing the work of TWGs, as well as ensuring that TA adds greater value to reform. Further, enhanced coordination of TWGs and TAs could be expected to increase overall efficiency of implementation, maximise integration, capitalise on synergies and minimise duplication of effort.
- It was noted that EDPITAF appears to be taking on *de facto* coordination functions for which it is neither mandated nor equipped. Whilst recognising that EDPITAF is well placed to ensure inter-program linkages, if adequately resourced, it is suggested that responsibility for leading or 'driving' the BESRA reform agenda and ensuring greater coordination and integration should be placed elsewhere.
- Some TA appears to have been well defined and effectively monitored and utilised, most notably in the case of the TWG responsible for SBM. However, in other cases, TA was not used to optimal efficiency and there appears to be wide variation in the extent to which their work was monitored, perhaps because TWG

¹³ BESRA Review presentation, Director Olaavar, February, 2010

Chairs lacked the capacity to effectively monitor because of other commitments, including to their own organic units. For example, TA was used to provide additional staff support, which made it difficult for contractor TAs to complete their tasks. To some extent, the presence of an AusAID-funded BESRA Policy and Strategy Adviser contributed to improved coordination of the TAs themselves which increase the 'value-adding' of their provision.

- **Provision of TA to regional office level:** has yet to commence although progress has been made in addressing the major delay in procurement of contractor. As at 15th April 2010, the procurement process was awaiting the approval of the DepED Bids and Awards Committee, and if approved, would trigger the next stage of the process, namely negotiations with the only successful bidder. Given the slow progress to date, it seems unlikely that provision of TA through the contractor will commence before July 2010. The procurement process has followed WB guidelines.
- The reasons for the delays appear to relate to much the same problems as those enumerated above with respect to capacity to prepare ToRs, to ensure efficient follow-up of decisions made and address delays efficiently, and to coordinate responsible officers within DepED. The responsibility for the latter largely has been taken on by EDPITAF – a body which lacks the capacity and organizational mandate to ensure action by the individuals, the TCT or organic units responsible¹⁴.

Component 2: Support for School-Based Management through grants for school improvement plans

- Only 10 schools have actually received SPHERE-funded SBM grants, with another 2,135¹⁵ grants only downloaded to DOs in March-April 2010. 74% of funds disbursements have now been downloaded to Division offices and are therefore unlikely to be available to schools before the new school year begins (June 2010).
- Training of regional, divisional and school level personnel has been undertaken across several functional responsibilities, sometimes with insufficient attention to monitoring the extent of actual application. The ambitious reform agenda of individual TWGs and widespread use of 'one shot' training events may, therefore, have compromised the efficiency of downstream capacity development. Limited attention to ensuring required capacity for DO level follow-up, or on-site mentoring, may further compromise the overall efficiency of the training.
- Training programs would benefit from careful review, reflection and evaluation. This would provide invaluable inputs for design and implementation of more efficient training programs. The required outputs of training programs should be an essential part of training plans.
- Efficient implementation appears to be hampered by delays in disbursement resulted from a significant financial 'congestion' in payment requests related to the

¹⁴ The procurement process began on 15th October, 2008; a revised ToR was finalised May 15, 2009. Source: verbal communication from Director Carpentario to Resources Review team

¹⁵ See Appendix 8:SBM Grants status report

school construction component which occurred in mid-2009. Delays also result from the large volume of uncoordinated reporting requirements, and lack of sustained follow-up on training

- The learner-centred focus of SIPs needs stronger articulation in advocacy initiatives. Training for SIP preparation has been most efficient in areas supported by STRIVE and BEAM, and demonstrates the requirements for sustained support for implementation of SIP preparation, in particular, and SBM in general, as well as advocacy

Component 3: Classroom construction in high need locations in Southern Philippines

- School Design and Construction: a detailed report and set of recommendations regarding the school construction component is attached as Appendix 5. See also Appendix 9; School Construction status report.
- The 'Principal led' process appeared to have operated efficiently with evidence of participation by key stakeholders, despite the concerns of some Principals that they were 'not technical'. Principals in schools visited, as well as DO level officials, understood required procurement, contracting and supervision processes. There was also clear evidence of very active engagement of the Principal and a school construction committee in the process, with high levels of motivation and apparent satisfaction with the completed building.
- Site selection: the processes were well understood but unevenly applied. For example, of 6 schools constructed in Cebu City, 3 did not meet the selection criteria.
- A high completion rate of 95% has been achieved for school construction suggesting a high degree of efficiency in implementation of this component. However, there were noticeable lapses in the efficiency and quality of implementation that need to be addressed.
- Classroom design and standard of construction: the construction time was well within the 60-90 days allowed. This suggests an efficient approach to construction, and construction supervision. However, it should be noted that despite the availability of several design alternatives, only one design was used irrespective of needs of the situation. In addition, the required specifications for the building design were not seen in some of the schools visited. There were evident lapses in the site appraisal of the school site, lack of attention to proper site adaptation of the building, and inconsistencies in the provision of toilet fixtures and accessories for the toilets for handicapped children, as well as required handicapped access provisions¹⁶.
- The Resources Review Team was advised that a standard costing per classroom unit was applied for each site, irrespective of the needs of the site. DepED/PFSED claimed that there were provisions for variations. However, DO level construction supervisors appeared unaware of this provision.
- Finally, the Resources Review Team was unable to verify the number and frequency of site visits by construction supervisors but did note that slow

¹⁶ Silay City Division School for the Disabled (SPED), visited by the Resources Review Team, used a standard classroom design which did not make adequate provisions for the special needs of the students for whom it was built.

reimbursement of travel costs for construction supervisors appeared to be an issue and may have influenced the frequency of site visits.

- It was reported that construction time was almost uniformly 60 days with no claims for liquidated damages. This may be taken to indicate that local-level contracting increased the efficiency of construction. However, it should be noted that in at least one DO, contractors were requested to submit a formal request for suspension of contract. This may have occurred because of delays in contract progress payments to some contractors.
- Delays in construction did occur, but appear to have been mainly at DepED/CO level, and principally with the processing of contract payment requests.
- Only one (1) Regional LRMD C has been completed to date with an additional two (2) Regional sites and one (1) Division site on-going; 26 sites have yet to commence with only ten (10) months remaining to physically meet targets.
- There are 10 months remaining to physically complete the LRMD Cs funded by SPHERE, with the remaining 26 LRMD C sites still needing a determination of location and site appraisals to be made. EDPITAF needs to present an “aggressive but realistic catch-up plan” to justify that the targets can be achieved within the remaining project period. A possible recommendation to meet the targets is to tap the services of the PFSED Regional and/or Division Engineers to assist in the site appraisal, design and construction supervision of the project. However, there may be a need to assess the present workloads of the said Division Engineers. There may also be a need to hire additional Architects/Engineers to augment the present staffing of EDPITAF

School furniture procurement

- Procurement of furniture was separated from school construction and devolved to DO level to increase the efficiency of procurement. Most schools visited by the IPR team were aware of the provision but none had received furniture under the SPHERE package of support. However, subsequently, the Resources Review team were advised by PFSED/CO that, in eligible DOs, deliveries of 27 % of school furniture, and 28% of teacher furniture, has taken place.
- Procurement delays have resulted from either the failure of a centralized regional bidding processes in Regions 7 and 12, or from delays in central-level funds disbursements. It is not clear why the two regions concerned chose to centralize the bidding at RO level.

Conclusions

• Issues affecting efficiency of disbursement and implementation

A number of factors affect efficiency of disbursement and implementation, including the following:

- **Late issuance of guidelines:** in the present highly centralized system, official guidelines represent the substantive triggers for action at lower levels in the system. Their delay, results in implementation delays. The Guidelines for the Implementation of FY 2007 SBM Grants (DepED Order No. 55, s. 2008) dated July 9, 2008, and that for FY 2009 (DepED Order No. 75 s. 2009), dated July 14, 2009, were issued in much later dates,

more than eighteen months and six months, respectively, after the supposed start of implementation. No guidelines were issued for the FY 2008, but the guidelines issued during the year were presumably followed. Neither are there guidelines for the FY 2010 as yet, but if DepED Order No. 75 remains to be applied for the year, then it should have been clearly communicated as such to prevent delays at DO level. Otherwise, the Division Offices would be waiting again for the FY 2010 guidelines before they move on.

- **Variable clarity of Guidelines:** guidelines are not clear and are open to interpretation. For example the guidelines state that upon release of the cheque payment to the schools, in the case of Non-Implementing Units, the DO will prepare the SOE. However, some divisions wait until the cash advances are liquidated before they prepare the SOE.
- **Hierarchical and compliance driven structures which inhibit initiative:** in the absence of specific deadlines for submission of SOEs, DOs routinely wait for calls or follow up from CO before submitting documents.
- **Inconsistencies between written guidelines and verbal instructions from CO:** for example, the guidelines require the submission of SOEs from the DO to RO for consolidation. However, DOs receive verbal instructions from CO to submit directly to them. Similarly, DOs are instructed to submit the SOE form twice; firstly, when funds release is requested, although partial filling up of the form is acceptable, and secondly, when actual payment has been made and the SOE form is completed. These inconsistencies cause confusion at the DO level.
- **Processing inefficiencies at CO level:** at the CO level, the Accounting Division waits for complete SOE submission by all DOs rather than processing as DO submissions are received. Whilst some 'batching' may be necessary, the current process leads to the accumulation of SOEs, and a slowing of the replenishment process.
- **Limited financial processing capacity:** there is evidence to suggest that capacity to manage financial processes has not kept pace with additional workload at central and field levels (Region, Division and school). The Resources Review Team was advised that, in the absence of approval of a Rationalisation Plan, DBM had approved additional appointments. However, however this does not appear to have improved transaction times as yet, despite hiring some staff on a 'service contract' basis, at higher salary levels.
- **Duplication in approval processes:** another factor contributing to the slow funds flow within DepED is the duplication in approval processes which seem to go beyond normal check and balance processes and lengthen transaction times. For example, in the case of SBM grants, OPS reviews and validates the list of recipient schools which are submitted under DO endorsement. However, the process is repeated when the fund release is requested. This is also the case for the SBP validation and review process. It is noted also that approval of schools and projects rests at CO, a situation not in line with the decentralization objective of SBM.
- **Limited coordination between concerned DepED organic units:** it has been noted that at the DepED/CO, coordination among the Accounting, Budget, Planning, Program Units and the PMO/EDPITAF is lacking.

Seldom do they meet to discuss implementation issues, share information and update one another. The same applies for inter-level coordination (i.e., CO and RO, CO and DO, and RO and DO). One negative outcome of this lack of coordination is poor financial programming which ultimately leads to delays in implementation.

- **Delayed liquidation of Cash Advances to School Principals:** DO Accountants noted that the inability of principals/school heads to liquidate their cash advances, in a timely manner, indicated a need for continuous follow up trainings. This should be the role of the DOs and ROs, however, could not be done due to lack of finance staff.
 - **COA compliance requirements:** DO accountants also noted that schools in more remote areas are unable to canvass three suppliers or to obtain official receipts (O.R.s). It may be necessary to review, and perhaps relax, these requirements.
- **Responsiveness in planning and implementation:** the application of SPHERE funds has not been sufficiently responsive to changing needs. Instead, a “one size fits all” approach to implementation has been used with little or no recognition that many regions, divisions and even schools are all at various stages of implementation and should be fostered and funded accordingly;
 - **Use of a ‘risk management’ approach** is necessary, especially to address outstanding concerns from review missions, including the capacity of DepED, and delays in clearly delineating roles and responsibilities. There remains a particular need to address reasons for delays in funds disbursements, especially MOOE and SBM grants to schools. This may include processes to ensure enhanced efficiencies in processing of requests for payment by the contractors at the Division level.
 - **Impact assessment:** an impact assessment at key implementation levels and prepare an “aggressive but realistic” catch-up plan/schedule to be able to accomplish the target of constructing 16 Regional and 16 Division LRMDs
 - **Strengthen technical support to EDPITAF** for the LRMD construction by hiring additional Architects & Engineers for the design and preparation of contract documents and tap existing manpower of PFSED to assist EDPITAF in the site appraisal, tender and construction supervision of the remaining 26 LRMDs in both the Regional and Division levels.
 - **Evaluate school designs:** although most school construction is completed, attention is required to evaluate current classroom designs, to revalidate priority listings, broaden the site survey process and ensure better site adaptation, adopt more flexible approaches to costing of construction to reflect needs, and enhance capacity at Division level for better building design and site supervision.

4. Impact

This Independent Progress Review comes 38 months after SPHERE resources were first transferred to the WB administered Trust Fund for DepED. Given the relatively short time frame, it is inappropriate to attempt an assessment of impact. It is also difficult to separate out the impact of SPHERE from that of other, related, projects. This also applies to assessment against the two indicators in the Performance

Assessment Framework (PAF) of the current AusAID Philippines Country Strategy which relate to SPHERE implementation are:

- PAF Objective 2.1 Universal Access to Basic Education (DepED better able to manage its resources to support schools and teachers)
- PAF Objective 2.2 Equitable Delivery of Quality Basic Education (Improved education opportunities for boys and girls, including Muslim and indigenous groups, in targeted areas to access quality education)

However, it is possible to comment on the extent to which SPHERE resources have contributed to overall progress in implementing BESRA. For example, whilst it is difficult to attribute any change in learning outcomes, such as an improvement in test scores, directly to SPHERE, other relevant indicators for BESRA that are regularly monitored (both qualitative and quantitative) reveal that through NPSBE and SPHERE there is a steady improvement.. For example, there are an increased number of schools implementing a school-based management system; there are an increased number of trained personnel in the system; there are manuals such as Primers for SBM or NCBTS produced and disseminated or ready for replication.

As noted above, there is evidence of change which now needs to be matched by accelerated implementation of key initiatives if the commitment to reform and demand created, itself an indication of impact, is to be realized in improved teaching and learning. For example, if most schools now have SIPs, then faster delivery of SBM grants is essential to ensure impact.

Conclusions

Assessing impact at this stage in the reform is problematic, particularly given the level of statistical analysis present in documentation of progress. However, it is important to note positive signs of change. Constructed school buildings are very prominent in the schools and provide a tangible example of the reform activity. The presence of these buildings appears to motivate school children, teachers, school administrators and community. On the basis of informal comments by school committee representatives, made during field visits, they appear to have also set higher standards for construction.

5. Sustainability

Sustainability is concerned with determining whether or not, and to what extent, the benefits of SPHERE are likely to continue after the funding ends. Given that funding only started to flow to the DepED in 2008, it may be perhaps too early to address questions of sustainability. However, one approach to addressing questions of sustainability is by drawing upon the framework, developed by Basel, Morgan and Ors¹⁷, which identifies a range of elements of capacity which are required for sustainability. They identified five 'capabilities, namely:

- (i) To commit and engage
- (ii) To carry out functions and tasks
- (iii) To relate and attract resources and support

¹⁷ (Basel, Morgan & Ors, April 2008)

- (iv) To adapt and self-renew (ie: to improve individual and organisational learning, to foster internal dialogue, to reposition and restructure the organisation; if required, to incorporate new ideas and map out a growth path)
- (v) To balance coherence and diversity (ie: to admit of new ideas and perspectives without losing focus and fragmenting)

In order to make an assessment of sustainability the IPR Team used four of the capabilities to assess the extent to which they are met or for which there is sufficient evidence of progress towards their development and institutionalisation.

- **Commitment and engagement, and capacity to carry out functions**

The IPR Team found clear evidence of commitment to the reform program and increasing capacity to develop relevant policies and implementation frameworks, at Central, Regional and Divisional levels, as well as quite strong commitment to reform in some of the schools visited. A significant number of initiatives have been undertaken by TWGs, including policy actions, development of implementation frameworks and development and implementation of training programs. Taken together with a pilot program of restructuring in three STRIVE-supported regions, the TEAM noted an impressive list of achievements and the existence of a strong foundation for achievement of objectives across a wide range of areas. However, in the absence of significant funds flows related to LRMDs and SBM, it is premature to assess the extent to which SPHERE support has added value to capacity to carry out new functions.

However, the IPR Team noted that sustainability will require greater effective transfer of knowledge and skills from external TA to those responsible in organic units for carrying forward the specific tasks such as monitoring and evaluation. It may also require recruitment of additional staff to better distribute key tasks related to technical support and monitoring, for example, in areas such as school supervision, professional support to school Principals, and school construction. A delay in finalising the Rationalisation Plan therefore presents a significant threat to sustainability.

SPHERE components were specifically directed towards laying down essential foundations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and sector spending by continuing to foster the mainstreaming of the SPHERE components in DepED's regular programs. There is not yet sufficient ownership of BESRA by the organic units as many personnel do not yet have confidence in their levels of capacity to handle the specialised nature of some of the innovations. The amount of "transfer of technology" to enhance capacity that could be expected from TA, and the degree to which organizational learning, and consequent action, has occurred at Central office level is low. Sustainability will only persist once the SPHERE initiatives are embedded in the regular work of the organic units rather than being seen as the responsibility of the TWGs to implement.

- **Capacity to adapt and self-renew**

The IPR Team suggests that the application of current processes and procedures may work against the overall intention of BESRA which is to foster adaptation and self renewal and to improve information flows up and down in the system. Even though the TWG's are intended to exist only until organic units are able to assume responsibilities for implementation, there are doubts as to the extent to which present structures and coordination arrangements are able to sustain reform. The organic units themselves have not yet adapted in ways consistent with the functional areas

and responsibilities envisaged for the TWGs structures, and tend to use 'top down' approaches to implementation. Whilst regional restructuring in the pilot regions has begun, delay in approval of the Rationalisation Plan seems likely to delay recruitment of staff consistent with new roles and responsibilities.

- **Capacity to balance diversity and coherence**

This is the capacity which requires the careful management of different capabilities, interests and identities within an organisation in order to gain benefits from diversity whilst still maintaining coherence and focus. This capacity also requires strong overall leadership to ensure an effective transition from existing to new structures, as well as strategic realignment of the human resource capacities of the organisation. Given that DepED has worked primarily through a new TCT and TWG's, each of which relies on personnel from existing structure, with existing roles and responsibilities and accountabilities, it is difficult to assess the extent to which this capacity is being enhanced under SPHERE funding and is likely to be sustainable. The Team notes that planning is being undertaken to introduce performance-based assessment and recruitment of teachers and school Principals, but considers that it is too early to see evidence of this capacity.

Conclusions

- There is evidence of increased ownership of BESRA as well as substantial efforts to establish changed policies and procedures, and implementation frameworks which provide the essential basis for sustained implementation.
- Training to build required skills and understandings at all levels is well underway but requires improved coordination and integration to encourage the transformation from reactive to responsive systems functioning which sustainability of BESRA requires. At this stage, implementation still tends to focus on compliance which is slowing the delivery of support to schools and take-up of new teaching and learning approaches at school level.
- Sustainability will only be achieved once the SPHERE initiatives are embedded in the regular work of the organic units rather than being seen as the responsibility of the TWGs to implement
- The amount of "transfer of technology" to enhance capacity that is expected from TA and the degree to which organizational learning, and consequent action, has occurred at Central level is low. Threats to sustainability include delays in providing rapid support to the regions by DepED CO to proceed with restructuring of the RO and regional operations, and capacity building, including additional human resources with necessary skills necessary for new roles and responsibilities. This includes capacity for effective management and supervision of school and LRMD construction

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Significant work has been undertaken on development of a quality management system which operationalises the Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (QAAF), finalised in February 2009, with support of TA provided under SPHERE. The objectives of QAAF are consistent with BESRA reform and, when implemented, will provide an essential set of tools for monitoring and evaluation.

DepED plans to implement the Quality Management System (QMS) through an initial 'modelling' in seven (7) regions, 18 Divisions and all schools in those divisions. Pending formal approval by the Secretary Education, work has already commenced on implementation through workshops designed to identify core processes required for implementation at all levels in Region X by the QAA and M&E TWG using SPHERE funding. The IPR team take this as an indication of a commitment to implementation and a willingness to move forward as quickly as possible.

Component 1: Translation of system-level policies into action
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- Whilst related training on SIP preparation has been conducted as part of EPIP and STRIVE DepED has been unable to meet SPHERE targets for training of regional personnel and has proposed revision of the targets in line with QAA targets in the BIAP.
- Disaggregated data is collected against key performance indicators. However the data is being kept in Excel spreadsheets which makes higher levels of statistical analysis difficult but which will be required if the monitoring and evaluation functions of DepED are to be enhanced. SPHERE funding provided specialists to assist further development of BEIS and SIS, and the OPS has been providing feedback to divisions and schools through EMIS on the quality of their data reported to BEIS.
- Given the status of QMS implementation, it is inappropriate to comment upon its effectiveness in collecting data and providing sufficient data reliability and validity. However, visits to Regions VIII and XII by the IPR team did note 'gaps' in capacity to adequately address M&E (eg: number and distribution of School Supervisors, lack of frequent monitoring and evaluation of classroom construction by Division Engineers). This stems partly from the inability of Regional Directors to recruit staff with the required qualifications and experience in statistical analysis because approval of the rationalisation plan has been delayed.
- SPHERE provided funding for the two training programs conducted by the TWG (QAA & M&E). These were (i) Orientation on the system for QMS Modelling (for 6 regions and 18 Divisions) and (ii) Training on Managing the SIP Appraisal Process and M&E System (for 3 Divisions in Region X and selected CO personnel). This modelling approach for operationalising the QMS, now being adopted by DepED, reduces the original target of 100% of all ROs to be trained on QA and M&E by the end of SY 2009 – 2010. The revised target is now just 6 RO and 18 Divisions including STRIVE regions that are also being supported by their own funding.
- The IPR team suggests that, consistent with the revised implementation targets, there be a revision of QA implementation which also recognises the capacity gaps at RO, DO and school level to perform an effective QA function across the system. This revision may also address the need to ensure better sequencing of training in QMS after the final stages of the SIP training program.
- Allied with the introduction of SBM, the DepED Basic Education Information System (BEIS) has been developed to institutionalize Quality Assurance and M&E processes at every level of the education management system as well as to support information requirements of school-based management, planning and policy formulation at all levels. BEIS is a very robust information

system, and SPHERE provided one system development specialist and two database programs to assist OPS to enhance the BEIS and SIS at CO level. The OPS has been providing feedback to divisions and schools through EMIS on the quality of their data reported to BEIS. So far a huge quantity of information related to M&E has been collected, organized, tabulated and reported as aggregated data to management committees. However, delays in provision of TA to RO levels, and limited capacity for data analysis, have restricted the overall effectiveness of M & E and gradual emergence of capacity for evidence-based planning. This is a serious issue and will continue to impede BESRA Implementation. It is noted that, both STRIVE and OPS (using SPHERE support) are planning more training to build greater capacity in M&E.

- A TA for Testing & Evaluation was engaged with SPHERE support to work in the NETRC to build capacity for regional and Divisional test implementers as well as to undertake a number of other assigned tasks. It is hoped that the results of the NAT can be processed more rapidly to allow schools to receive data on the least mastered skills of learners so that appropriate interventions can be implemented.

Component 2: Support for School-Based Management through grants for school improvement plans

- Funding for SBM and SIPs is delayed and so further development and reviewing of plans is also delayed
- It was noted that schools find difficulty in accurately costing SIPs in a realistic manner

Component 3: Classroom construction in high need locations in Southern Philippines

- Logistical support and/or additional technical support at the Division level is required for increased mobility in achieving effective site appraisal surveys, preparation of site adaptation drawings; prepare the necessary documentation for tender and application for building permits, witness material testings, and more frequent inspections at the sites during the construction period
- Improve capacity for monitoring/supervision of construction is required to address construction concerns (eg: lack of site adaptation plans, quality of construction)

Conclusions

- The IPR team suggests that SPHERE support be focused on the phased implementation of key BESRA reforms within known, high-performing divisions, and with a geographic spread, in order to demonstrate to a new National Administration (after May, 2010) that BESRA is successful. All efforts should be directed to showcasing a complete and functioning SBM program with SIPs, DEDPs and an REDP that contain a thorough plan for INSET, a QA system for all levels, and a funding model that distributes funding to schools that satisfy the M&E requirements
- For those regions still finding progress in BESRA difficult to maintain, DepED could simplify the content and processes required to introduce and sustain

reform efforts. Reform usually occurs most effectively where capacity building and training builds on existing levels of knowledge and skills.

- Following RA9155, all primary monitoring and QA management roles are to be shifted directly to the Regional Offices, and all Division Offices are to become the implementation managers. A carefully-staged training program for capacity-building should therefore accompany this transfer of responsibility. This would also require increased oversight capacity for OPS since its current staffing of 10 persons is inadequate for the enlarged role envisaged for it.
- Finally, ensure that OPS joins collaboratively with the RO to analyze and interpret the monitoring and evaluation information collected at DO and School level and show how it gives feedback and can improve implementation actions.

7. Gender Equality

SPHERE aims to contribute to the achievement of the Philippines' basic education goals of 'improving quality and equity in learning outcomes' for both boys and girls. It does this by using DepED systems and processes, thereby indirectly supporting efforts at DepED. SPHERE funding, however, is not being utilised to actively promote gender equality and equity.

SPHERE has likely contributed to the modest improvements in school performance that have been reported by DepED. Girls continue to have better educational profile than boys, but boys' school performance has been improving more than the girls. This has resulted in a narrowing of gender gap in completion, cohort survival, and dropout rates, particularly at the elementary level. At the secondary level, net enrolment was rising and gender disparity narrowing, cohort survival was improving, but gender disparity was increasing, and dropout rates and gender gaps are both declining. Appendix 4 contains a detailed gender analysis of SPHERE.

A. Identifying and addressing gender equality issues

There were three ways in which gender concerns were identified under SPHERE, and none of these allows for systematic incorporation of gender analysis into BESRA. One is through the Joint Implementation Review Missions. A second is through Technical Assistance (TA), as evident in a TA that was directly funded by AusAID in July 2009. A follow-up to the recommendation of the February 2009 Joint Review Mission, the gender TA aimed at raising the awareness of the TWGs of gender issues. To do this, a workshop was conducted that led to a gender assessment of BIAP and suggestions of ways of enhancing the sensitivity of various TWGs to gender concerns. The IPR Team discovered there has been little effort to pursue these suggestions. A third way is through efforts outside SPHERE either in DepED normal operations or in projects (e.g. STRIVE and BEAM). Different levels of DepED generate sex-disaggregated data for the BEIS. However, the IPR Team found little evidence that these data are being analysed and causes of gender differences in school performance and achievement explored as inputs to the SIP, DEDP, and REDP.

B. Supporting DepED mainstreaming efforts

The DepED has mainstreamed gender in key processes and functions: sex-disaggregation in BEIS, review of learning materials for commercial production, NCBTS, and, until recently, the training programs of the HRDS. Except for the gender and development (GAD) training of the HRDS, these have been continued under the BESRA by the relevant TWG's. By using DepED processes, SPHERE has

been implicitly supporting DepED gender mainstreaming efforts. While investigating the implementation of various components, the IPR Team noted the challenges faced in this approach.

Component 1: Translation of system-level policies into action

- Of the TAs, only the TA to the TCT included consideration of gender concerns in his Terms of Reference (TOR). Nonetheless, at least some of the other TAs have or can address gender concerns. Examples are the TA for ALS advocacy, and the QAA and M&E-related TAs. Moreover, the results of the short-term gender TA in July 2009 were not pursued.
- There have been some training or capacity-building activities on gender particularly for regional and division education managers under STRIVE and BEAM. However, these did not seem to include building their capacity to analyse data and information, craft programs that respond to gender issues, and provide feedback to the DepED Central Office on gender-differentiated situation, needs, access, and performance of female and male learners. Insofar as teachers' training is concerned, it is not clear how INSET is preparing teachers to become more sensitive to the learning situations of boys and girls, considering that 'gender and development' rates low in the NCBTS-based prioritization of teachers,
- The 35 or so titles of learning/instructional materials that will be produced and disseminated are being reviewed. The review reportedly uses the IMCS assessment criteria that include anti-sexism in language and gender-fair messages and graphics. However, it was not clear to the IPR Team whether the revised materials are indeed free of sexist and gender biases and promote gender equality and fairness.

Component 2: Support for School-Based Management through grants for school improvement plans

School-level gender-disaggregated data are being generated, but are not being analysed during preparation of School Improvement Plans. The IPR Team found however, that when led through a gender analysis of the education and economic situation in the community, parents, teachers and barangay officials are able to identify the significance of gender issues and are willing to address them in the SIP.

Component 3: Classroom construction in high need locations in Southern Philippines

The 2007 version of the DepED Education Facilities Handbook specifies latrine facilities for boys and girls, including the provision of toilet facilities for disabled boys and disabled girls. Some of the classrooms visited by the IPR Team, however, had only one toilet, and if there were two toilets, there was no running water. Muslim girls in particular will not come to school while menstruating when schools do not have separate toilets with running water. EDPITAF claimed that UNICEF and LGUs are being tapped to provide water and sanitation facilities in schools.

In summary, SPHERE has supported certain gender mainstreaming processes at DepED, but it has not actively promoted a more gender-responsive BESRA or educational system. Using the Harmonized GAD Guidelines, the implementation of

SPHERE is rated as “gender sensitive” (12.75). This means that SPHERE support can be improved to produce policies, plans and programs that are responsive to the needs and situations of female and male learners and teachers.

Suggested Areas of Action

Conclusions

- TA is needed to help BESRA to put in place gender analysis tools that can be used in specific situations and for education planning at various levels.
- Research studies are required to find out why there are no differences in performance of boys and girls in some areas yet there are big differences in others, and how parental decisions concerning education of boys and girls have been affected by economic crises, droughts, and job opportunities overseas.
- Evidence-based planning for school construction, ensuring the provision of toilet and water facilities for both boys and girls in SPHERE-financed classrooms, and monitoring and reporting whether these facilities are found in SPHERE classrooms.
- There is a need to set accountability within BESRA for the promotion of gender equality and equity in connection with the vision of a learning environment that is gender-fair and free of discrimination and violence, and for ensuring that recommendations from the gender TA and from other TAs are translated into policies and actions.
- QAA measures have to be developed for assessing responsiveness of SIPs to key gender issues facing both teachers and learners.
- It is important that school constructions are guided by evidence-based plans and include the provision of toilet and water facilities for both boys and girls in SPHERE-financed classrooms, and that monitoring and reporting reflect whether these facilities are found in SPHERE classrooms.

8. Analysis and Learning

- **AusAID and DepED have both demonstrated a willingness to learn from experience and to adjust the SPHERE program to address the observations and recommendations from review missions.** AusAID has responded positively to requests from DepED for specific assistance, for example, to provide additional TA. The design of SPHERE is sound and based on a reasonable expectation that reform of policies at CO level will then lead to reforms at RO, DO and School level. It is understood that the “top-down” implementation is to be balanced by a corresponding feedback from schools back up to CO. In summary, there is evidence that the program is based upon, and revised according to, sound technical analysis.

However, the IPR team questions whether six monthly joint progress reviews are too intrusive and time consuming to support building of the different working/trust relationship with government? We question whether the program timeframe for SPHERE results in DepED focussing more on performance indicators than on the effectiveness of implementation processes and on compliance rather than on evidence-based decision-making.

- **DepED has made notable adjustments to targets based on experiences so far.** For example, STRIVE is being used to trial a number of SPHERE innovations, such as the quarterly Monitoring and Evaluation Adjustments carried out at Division, Region and meta-Region levels, and this is a positive use of an existing project. However the IPR team suggests that other lessons

learnt from previous project interventions such as BEAM can be integrated in BESRA implementation. For example, DO and RO level officers, who have oversight responsibility for the school, must also be included in orientation for the reform, are familiarised with it and are given some responsibility to participate in the activity. Further, feedback must be actively sought from DO and school levels to ensure that planned actions are sustainable. Capturing best practices from earlier projects, particularly in SIP preparation, will identify practical ways to give greater local autonomy within SBM, especially in the area of LGC formation which is poorly developed under BESRA.

- **Leadership for Strategic Planning and Coordination in DepED (central level).** BESRA reform is well conceived but ambitious. It is also relatively new and has yet to take root. Whilst attempts were made to establish structures for the reform which were designed to address new core organisational functions (through the TCT and TWG structures), it was not accompanied by an analysis of the overall capacity needs of reform, nor mechanisms to ensure appropriate capacity development and improved accountabilities.

For the last three years, the reform has been marked by an absence of, strong overall leadership, and by a continuation of 'loosely coupled' central level structures. Thus, the reform effort is diffused across all areas of the reform, using mechanisms (TCT/TWGs) which themselves have limitations. There is still a tendency to think in terms of projects rather than programs, which may be due, in part, to the external nature of some of the assistance provided, for example in Technical Assistance. This suggests that supporting DepED efforts to sharpen the focus of reform would be useful; and especially to identify priority areas of reform, as well as those regions/Divisions likely to be best placed to scale up rapidly.

Further, the absence of a 'driver of change' in Central Office together with installed capacity for strategic planning and strong leadership able to ensure efficient implementation and accountability, has resulted in relatively weak linkages between critical planning and implementation functions/organic units, especially regions and divisions. As a result, CL generally seen as disconnected, unresponsive and demanding.

This suggests that a 3-4 year timeframe for development assistance focused on supporting BESRA reform may not allow sufficient time for embedding of more efficient processes and procedures essential for effective change.

- **Change Management:** Efforts to build institutional capacity across core functions of DepED have been addressed through a number of workshop and training events, and distribution of manuals and guidelines. However, there is an absence of an overall change management strategy for BESRA, based upon thorough capacity needs assessment. In addition, there is limited coordination of training across DepED, and limited capacity for follow-up training or mentoring which might ensure greater efficiency in understanding of, and application of, financial processes.

Significant gaps were evident between CL and RO/DOs; these generally appear weak and focussed mainly on one-way, downward, transmission of DepED Orders, instructions, guidelines and oral presentations/training and a proliferation of 'orientation' workshops. 'Upward' transmission is limited to responses to often uncoordinated, requests for information. It is evident from discussions with field level staff that that the latter have limited impact,

especially where they are not accompanied by written materials. **Greater utilisation of the MANCOM as part of overall BESRA coordination may ensure greater inclusion of ROs and enhanced downstream coordination.**

Timeframes for reform do not adequately build upon understandings about, and best practices for, effective change management. Attention is often given to teachers, civil society organizations and school principals, but less to the change 'brokers' – divisional, regional and (especially) central level managers.

Structures focus on compliance rather than efficiency with limited apparent understanding of the actual requirements for implementation eg: Rationalisation Plan based on existing functions and staffing levels rather than a needs assessment linked to implementation requirements of new core functions. This suggests that a critical area for development partner assistance concerns strategic planning and change management. A new administration is expected in DepED which may offer an opportunity for a review and strengthening of BESRA and an opportune time to offer technical support for institutional strengthening and strategic planning, as components of a new aid strategy.

- **Financial Planning and Accountability:** Although there has been evidence of concerted efforts to improve financial processes, they remain characterized by a weakness in capacity for financial planning and management, problem identification and solution finding, and forward planning to ensure increased efficiency in funds flow. Weak financial planning was evident in DepED/CL and some Divisions, eg: delayed submission of SOE by Division to CL which slowed down the replenishment of the Special Account.

Problems include lack of clarity and timeliness of guidelines, unresponsive systems and structures, slow funds disbursement, and a strong emphasis on compliance. Monitoring and validation are not regularly conducted perhaps related to inefficient procedures for reimbursement to staff, and, despite efforts to strengthen criteria for school selection, evidence was found that criteria were not followed for selection of school sites for classroom construction. There is also an uneven understanding of workflow processes, especially timely submission of liquidation documents, and uneven capacity for core functions such as bookkeeping at school level.

Further, additional accountability requirements may be unnecessary or duplicative eg: SOE requirements, some WB procedures (NOC). COA pre-audit requirements for funds transfer and cash advance increasing despite efforts to address them introduce additional procedural steps.

An additional problem appears to be the lack of capacity to ensure timely completion of processes. Organic personnel claim to be overburdened with their regular tasks or activities, and core functions are often filled by temporary contract staff whose rapid turnover affects overall efficiency of implementation.

- **Importance of refocussing of aid assistance on financial management capacity in DepED:** this suggests the importance of refocussing of aid assistance on financial management capacity in DepED, including a capacity

needs assessment, and on capacity development at Division level, focussed on improving evidence-based, performance-based, planning and resource allocations. It may also include re-orientation of all Division Accountants, particularly on the preparation of SOE, to ensure the fast and continuous replenishment of SPHERE funds from the World Bank.

- **Communication:** The IPR Team endorses the concerns raised in previous review missions, regarding the slow progress in developing a strong advocacy and communications program. There is a lack of evidence that BESRA is well understood, particularly outside the level of CO. There is evidence that some senior managers have been schooled in the reform dimensions and can explain the overall intentions but in general terms BESRA is still seen as 'project' assistance and an acceptance that reform will come through a series of top-down instructions, each with specific compliance requirements.

The BESRA Implementation and Accountability Plan (BIAP) was approved only very recently and is yet to be fully implemented. It is therefore particularly important to accompany the BIAP with a clear communications plan for BESRA, which would assist in building accountability and the basis for improved efficiency in processes and procedures. This would also address the present absence of a clear communication protocol or strategy to address or elevate problems to seek a resolution, and to minimize, or eliminate, implementation delays.

Financial Guidelines are usually provided during orientations conducted by the CO. However, these are subject to various interpretations. Also, guidelines are issued late, and include instructions which conflict with verbal instructions from CO/RO. Information on EPIP not properly disseminated both at CO and field, and evidence exists to suggest confusion among Accountants on the funds flow modality for SPHERE (because review and approval processes vary for every component, i.e. SBM grant, classroom construction, furniture, and NCBTS).

This suggests the need to carefully review BIAP implementation and identify efficient ways of ensuring improved communication and training on key processes and procedures. Further, it is suggested that the "broad-brush" approach to training, particularly as used in SBM, does not take sufficient account of the different needs or stages of development of the personnel being trained. For example, whilst school personnel need to be trained in SIP preparation, DO and RO personnel should be trained more in the M&E and QA roles that they will have in providing support to schools.

The IPR team suggests that DepED be encouraged to focus on building systems and approaches which encourage a culture of 'learning' rather than compliance. This can be expected to take time but can be practically embedded in design of training programs which are demand driven and which draw on analysis of lessons learnt from previous projects and programs. It is suggested that DepED review present targets and refocus SPHERE support so that it is geared to current stages of development, based on careful analysis of progress so far. This would allow for a greater integration of lessons learnt from TEEP and SEDIP built on with BEAM and STRIVE support.

EVALUATION CRITERIA RATINGS

(Overall Rating: 4)

Criterion	Rating	Justification
Relevance	5	SPHERE is in line with BESRA and the AusAID Philippines Country Strategy, and can contribute significantly to BESRA implementation. However, there is insufficient linkage with successful outputs of related projects.
Effectiveness	4	SPHERE has supported TAs to help develop policies, standards and implementation frameworks. There is good progress in school construction, modest progress against other output indicators, and the beginnings of Regional Office restructuring in STRIVE regions. Volume and breadth of reform initiatives constrain depth and institutionalisation of new practices and procedures.
Efficiency	3	Training of key personnel has taken place across various functional responsibilities, consistent with policy initiatives. TA has been engaged as appropriate. School construction is 95% completed. Capacity 'gaps' constrain efficiency especially in financial management. While there have also been efforts to address bottlenecks, very low disbursements and implementation delays continue to hamper efficient delivery.
Sustainability	4	SPHERE is embedded in government systems and feedback from review processes is being utilised, including to improve financial management. Demonstrated commitment to reform is evident in DepED, however, progress is constrained by slow delivery and delayed approval of key policies/processes eg: the Rationalisation Plan.
Gender Equality	4	SPHERE is supporting DepED processes and initiatives that aim to address gender disparity issues. However, planning is not sufficiently informed by data analysis of gender disparities in education outcomes, including for school design, especially latrine provision.
Monitoring & Evaluation	4	An M&E System is in place to collect appropriate data, including sex-disaggregated outcome indicators, and to provide feedback to personnel at all levels of the system. QAAF/QMS have been developed, trainings conducted across organic units, and QMS system being trialled. However, a narrow focus on output indicators and on compliance, a lack of logistical support for monitoring, constrains conduct of effective M&E outside the Central Office. Capacity building in M&E is not demand driven, causing some training in M&E to occur in advance of the implementation of the initiative to be measured (e.g. SIP formulation)
Analysis and Learning	4	SPHERE is based on sound technical analysis. It pursues key areas identified from AusAID and other ODA projects. Issues identified during semi-annual reviews have resulted in some changes. By supporting the GoP reform agenda, systems and processes, SPHERE implementation is in line with Australian commitment to both the Paris Declaration and the Accra Accord. However, there is insufficient use of project reviews, analysis and lessons learnt.

Rating Scale

Satisfactory		Less than satisfactory	
6	Very high quality	3	Less than adequate quality
5	Good quality	2	Poor quality
4	Adequate quality	1	Very poor quality

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Significant progress had been made in development of policies and implementation frameworks, plus training materials and modules, which provide a strong basis for the pace of reform to accelerate once funds disbursement delays have been effectively addressed. However, there remain major delays across most SPHERE components. The reasons for the delays are complex but appear to result from the limited capacity within DepED for efficient financial management, rather than in WB/Trust fund processing delays. The IPR team does not recommend disengagement from the Trust Fund arrangement at this stage in the life of the grant.

It is suggested that a strategic refocussing of support on substantive barriers to BESRA reform, including leadership capacity and strategic planning, financial planning and change management would yield important gains for the progress of BESRA reforms. This support could be complemented by continuation of support for more efficient financial and human resource management processes (FMIS, HRIS & UIS) and include: strengthening capacity for strategic planning, and, planning and capacity development for effective change management, together with support for implementation of change management processes.

Recommendation 1: AusAID considers a concentration of funding on central core level structures and functions of DepED in order to strengthen and ensure continuity of reform in important areas such as strategic planning, financial management and change management.

Recommendation 2: AusAID engages with the WB to seek ways to jointly engage with DepED and support development of enhanced capacity for strategic planning, enhanced financial management and effective change management.

2. There is evidence of strong DepED commitment to reform, particularly at school level. But delays in transfer of funds puts at risk efforts to build commitment and ensure greater sustainability of SBM.

Recommendation 3: that AusAID continues to engage with DepED to seek an accelerated disbursement of pending SPHERE funds and continuation of its efforts to address and correct current bottlenecks in fund disbursement.

3. Passively supporting gender mainstreaming at DepED has not enabled SPHERE and BESRA to address key gender issues at various levels. The lack of capacity to utilise sex-disaggregated data and to analyse the reasons that cause the gender-differentiated education outcomes is one important capacity gap.

Recommendation 4: that AusAID actively encourages DepED to use SPHERE resources for a gender-focused TA that would help build capacities for gender analysis and planning at different levels and for BESRA TWGs to identify and address key gender issues, including the

provision of separate toilets with running water as part of SPHERE classroom construction support

4. The IPR noted DepED's concern to adjust certain implementation targets (for example, regional rationalization, and suggests that such adjustments are to be encouraged, especially where they give tangible recognition to the different developmental stages of Regions, Divisions and schools, and the personnel working in them. The IPR team also recognizes the significance of the political 'equity' argument being mounted by RDs. However, slow implementation and delays in approval of the Rationalisation Plan lend weight to the need to focus more sharply on regions and areas where implementation across a range of activities can be achieved rapidly and provide important lessons for DepED.

Recommendation 5: that as part of discussions concerning the DepED request for reprogramming of SPHERE resources, AusAID engages with DepED U/Sec (Programs & Planning) to agree on a realignment of SPHERE resources to best address the most effective phasing of interventions, and to ensure an acceleration of implementation within the remaining period of the SPHERE grant.

5. **Future programming:** although strictly outside the ToR of the IPR, the team felt it important to draw upon the observations made during this IPR to suggest important areas for a future AusAID program of support. This is because, whilst the focus of the present SPHERE support has been appropriate, experience suggests that a sharper focus on critical areas of reform, namely data management, teacher education and SBM may enhance DepED efforts to secure sustainable change at school level. In particular, AusAID may wish to consider including a stronger focus on strengthening data analysis capacities, on institutionalizing teacher standards (including accreditation of teachers and teacher education institutions), and addressing gaps in delivery of pre-service education and INSET. This could be complemented by a stronger focus on support for SBM implementation and enable DepED to capitalize on, and scale up effective practices which were part of BEAM and STRIVE.

1. Recommendations on conduct of future IPRs:

- a. Separate the IPR from the regular semi-annual joint Reviews with the World Bank. Whilst the WB team were cooperative and supportive, the presence of a large combined team introduced an added complexity into the work of the IPR team.
- b. Allow sufficient time for review of key documents, to allow team to determine the most appropriate data gathering methods to be used, and prepare a list of key informants.
- c. As much as possible, the Review Team should determine the key elements of the program, including field visit locations. In the case of this IPR, DepED made comprehensive arrangements for field visits and meetings with DepED staff at Central level. However, organisation for two teams of unequal size, each with different information needs, made it difficult for the IPR team to obtain access to key informants they needed. It would have been improved had team members had greater inputs into

the program, and to the locations to be visited. However, it was also noted that there were some restrictions on sites available for visiting due to security concerns.

- d. As much as possible, ensure that field visits are arranged to relevant sites. In this case, visits were arranged to BEAM and STRIVE project sites/areas. Whilst these initiatives support SPHERE objectives, it made the identification of specific SPHERE contributions difficult to isolate.
- e. Similarly, widespread use of FGDs needs to be balanced by opportunities for individual interviews with key informants. FGDs tended to comprise presentations with limited opportunity to engage in more depth on key issues of interest to the IPR team.

APPENDICES