



SUMMARY INVESTMENT DESIGN DOCUMENT

Investment Title: Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR program Phase 2 (BEQUAL 2)	
Start date: 1 July 2022	End date: 30 June 2026
Total proposed DFAT funding: up to AUD 28M	Total proposed funding from all donor/s: TBD

A. Introduction

Lao PDR faces persistent and critically low performance of primary school students on measures of learning achievement. Improving primary school learning outcomes is essential as a basis for achieving the levels of education attainment necessary for the development of a skilled workforce, and also for broader social well-being – both of which are key contributors to the achievement of national economic and social development objectives.

The first priority policy objective of the Lao Government's (GoL) *Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (ESSDP) 2021-25* is to 'refocus the sectoral priority on primary education to improve content knowledge and pedagogical skills of primary teachers' as a means to improve learning outcomes. However, while the plan gives high priority to basic education quality improvement, the education system faces severe fiscal constraints and is characterised by limited human resource and institutional capacity, and by significant inequity across multiple dimensions including socio-economic, gender, and ethnicity. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating development challenges, including increased inequality and hardships faced by already vulnerable groups. These economic and social effects exert additional pressure on public finance that will likely further constrain education sector financing, as well as affecting school attendance for students and educators.

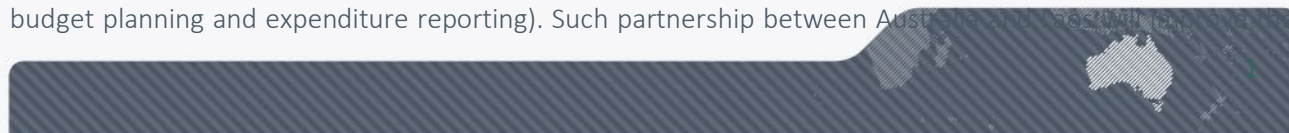
The Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR (BEQUAL) Phase 2 aims to support GoL to respond to the learning crisis challenge. The program goal is "more girls and boys of primary school-age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, improve learning outcomes". To achieve the goal, the program will support the achievement of improved teaching, to better facilitate primary students inclusive learning.

BEQUAL is Australia's flagship program supporting primary education in Laos. The first phase covers the period 2015-2022 and has focused on supporting GoL with a major reform of the primary school curriculum. The second phase, BEQUAL 2, will cover the period July 2022 to June 2026 with a possible four year extension beyond that, and will continue the substantial progress and build on the achievements of the first phase, assisting the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to complete national roll-out of the curriculum for the full five grades of primary education. With curriculum introduced to schools, the program will increasingly focus on supporting policy and strengthening systems for teacher professional development. This will enable a gradual transition from a direct service delivery orientation to a system reform approach that aims to

strengthen government ownership and to promote sustainability. As the program develops a more policy-oriented and 'systems thinking' approach it will seek to leverage evidence and knowledge from its technical work and its engagement with districts, to facilitate the scaling-up of successful approaches through knowledge to policy to practice processes.

Through its role as co-chair of the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), DFAT will continue to play a leadership role in policy dialogue with the Lao Government on challenging reform issues, including education financing, equity and quality issues, relevant to our education investment.

A successful investment will re-affirm Australia's commitment and adaptability as a partner of choice in the education sector. It will also promote the Lao Government's ownership of key reforms in teacher development, in parallel to other reforms pursued through complementary Australian investments (e.g. budget planning and expenditure reporting). Such partnership between Australia and Laos is

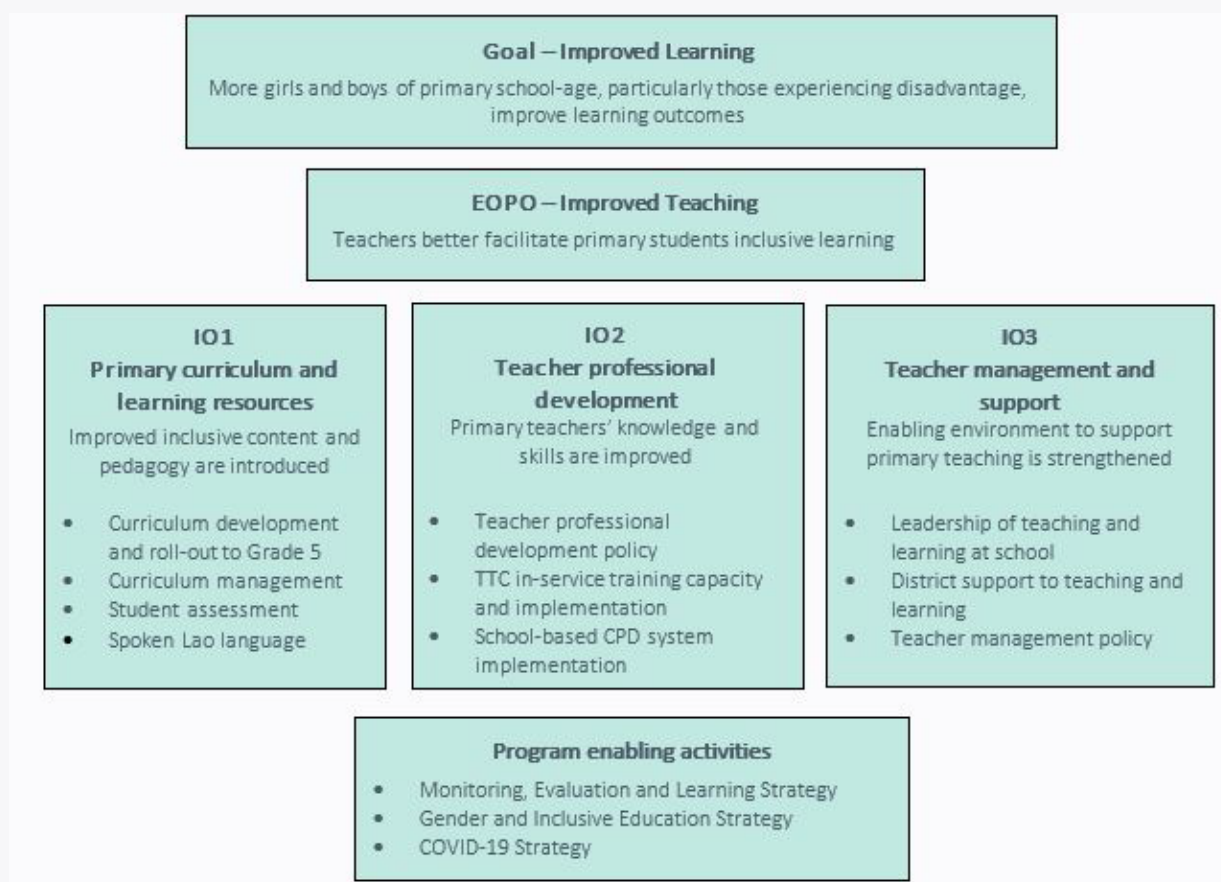


quality of primary education in Lao PDR, close the gap for targeted disadvantaged schools, and contribute to improved learning outcomes in the long term.

B. Program Logic

The program goal is “*more girls and boys of primary school-age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, improve learning outcomes*”. The goal responds to, and is intended to contribute towards the achievement of the objectives of the current Australian Government Laos COVID-19 Development Response Plan¹, GoL’s education priorities² and the SDG goals for education. To achieve the goal, the program will support the achievement of a single end of program outcome, improved teaching, to better facilitate primary students inclusive learning.

Figure 1: BEQUAL Phase 2 Program Logic



Three inter-related intermediate outcomes (that may be considered as components) will together contribute to improved teaching. These focus on completing the primary curriculum reform as a basis for improved learning (IO1), improving teachers’ knowledge and skills through strengthening the teacher professional development system (IO2), and strengthening support systems for teachers (IO3).

C. Budget and Resources

The BEQUAL 2 budget is up to a maximum of AUD 28M, over the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2026, with an average annual budget of AUD 7M. This represents a significant reduction in the program budget from around AUD 80M over seven years in Phase 1. The budget reduction is a result of both a reduction in the Australian budget availability and likely reduction in funding support from other development partners³.

¹ Laos COVID-19 Development Response Plan (CDRP). Australian Government, October 2020.

² Outlined in the MOES Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-25.

³ The European Union and USAID provided financing contributions to Phase 1. The prospects of support from other development partners are uncertain.

A preliminary budget estimate by the three components (IOs), underpinned by detailed assumptions on activity and management costs, is presented in Figure 2. It is emphasised that component budget allocations may be revised prior to program start-up.

Fig 2: BEQUAL 2 Indicative Estimated Budget 2022/23 to 2025/26 (AUD)

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
IO1: Curriculum & Learning Resources	2,750,000	1,950,000	450,000	450,000	5,600,000
IO2: Teacher Professional Development	1,200,000	1,400,000	1,650,000	1,650,000	5,900,000
IO3: Teacher Management and Support	850,000	950,000	1,150,000	1,150,000	4,100,000
Program enabling activities (incl. M&E, GEDSI, COVID)	710,000	710,000	710,000	710,000	2,840,000
Program Management (incl. core team and TA)	2,090,000	2,090,000	2,090,000	2,090,000	8,360,000
DFAT Management (incl. MTR, ESWG and TAG)	250,000	250,000	450,000	250,000	1,200,000
TOTAL	7,850,000	7,350,000	6,500,000	6,300,000	28,000,000

The component budget profile, with substantial funding for IO1 in year 1, and with increasing allocation to components IO2 and IO3 from year 2, reflects the transition from primary curriculum reform to the wider agenda of teaching quality. The program will retain planning and budget flexibility for scaling-up activities in the event of availability of additional funding, or scaling-down in the event of budget reductions. Frequent inputs from a Technical Advisory Group (TAG), a program Mid-Term Review (MTR) and continuous engagement in the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) have been budgeted as mechanisms to support the strategic management of BEQUAL 2.

D. Approach and Main Activities

BEQUAL 2 will build on the substantial progress and achievements of Phase 1, making an incremental but clear transition from a primary curriculum reform-centred initiative to one that embraces the wider agenda of teaching quality and focuses on the strengthening of a teacher professional development system.

1. Primary curriculum and learning resources (IO1)

BEQUAL 2 will continue to support implementation of key Phase 1 activities including completing the *national primary curriculum roll-out for grades 4 – 5* in three subjects (Lao Language, Science & Environment, and English), through materials development and production, and provision of nationwide in-service training for all teachers and pedagogical advisers. From an educational perspective it is necessary to ensure continuity of content and pedagogy for the primary grades 4 and 5 so that students can progress through primary school education under consistent teaching and learning approaches. The technical rationale for these activities, and specific approaches and methodologies, will remain essentially unchanged, although subject to ongoing monitoring, evaluation, learning and adjustment where necessary.

Phase 2 will support MoES to implement an *Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes* (ASLO⁴) study in 2023 or 2024. It is envisaged that a Grade 3 ASLO standardised with that implemented in Phase 1 in 2017 will be supported. In addition, it is envisaged that Laos will participate in the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) Grade 5 2023 cycle as a follow up to the 2019 study (with support from UNICEF). Each will allow comparison of trends in learning achievement at the respective grades. The option of supporting a further ASLO around 2028 during the possible Phase 2 extension is highlighted. Technical support will be provided to build MOES capacity in designing, implementing and systematising the ASLO as a regular function, as a basis for ongoing measurement of student learning outcomes. Importantly, ASLO will be the primary means of measuring BEQUAL program performance at the goal and outcome levels.

⁴ The term ASLO is commonly used in the Lao education system as a national (representative) sample based assessment.

Support to the development of *formative and summative assessment*⁵ approaches and tools will be provided as part of curriculum development. Guidance and tools (e.g. scoring rubrics) are incorporated in curriculum related materials, including teacher guides and teacher resource packs. Student assessment approaches will be included in teacher professional development activities supported under IO2.

The Spoken Lao Pilot (SLP) is a Phase 1 Lao language program for children who arrive at primary school not speaking Lao (around 40 per cent of Lao children’s mother tongue is not Lao). The main objectives of the pilot are, a) improve learning outcomes for the subject Lao Language for non-Lao speaking grade 1 students through the introduction of 1 hour per day of spoken Lao learning and practise, and b) test a practical, flexible strategy to address educational access and learning equity issues with a view to informing MoES policy and curriculum development. Phase 2 will support a *Spoken Lao Language program* drawing on the results of the SLP. Scaling up the program in Phase 2 is a significant opportunity that has potential to result in significant improvements in early grade literacy and improved student learning outcomes across the curriculum.

Figure 3: Summary of IO1 - Primary curriculum and learning resources

Scope and main activities	Rationale and Key Issues
<p>1.1 Development, printing and distribution of all core teaching and learning materials (textbooks, teacher guides, teacher resource packs, and supplementary materials) for grade 5 in three subjects</p> <p>Consolidation and finalisation of primary curriculum framework</p> <p>Provision of technical support to curriculum management and M&E including refinements to curriculum materials</p>	<p>Curriculum development, materials production and distribution, ToT, and F2F will be implemented using Phase 1 approaches and systems including GEDSI analysis and review (that have worked well), with adjustments in response to lessons learned</p> <p>Relatively modest continued technical support to RIES in years 3-4, informed by capacity and organisational needs assessment</p>
<p>1.2 Training-of-trainer programs (ToT), for master trainers (MT) and provincial trainers (PT) in preparation for grade 5 nationwide INSET in 3 subjects</p> <p>Nationwide introduction of new grade 4 and grade 5 curriculum (in 3 subjects) to all schools through INSET for all teachers and pedagogical advisers</p>	<p>Nationwide introduction of the new curriculum is a high priority, using the same (or similar) delivery and financing mechanisms used for Phase 1</p> <p>It will be necessary to clarify arrangements and funding for Grade 4 F2F in respect to Phase 1 to Phase 2 transition</p> <p>Training programs should make conscious effort to improve women’s representation in training roles and provide support required for trainers with special needs.</p>
<p>1.3 Student Assessment</p> <p>Support to implementing and institutionalising Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO)</p> <p>Developing approaches and tools for formative and summative assessments</p>	<p>Implementation of a Grade 3 ASLO standardised with that undertaken in 2017. Data will be sex, disability and ethnicity disaggregated. This will provide a mid-line assessment as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • base-line 2017 • mid-line supported in 2023 or 2024 (Phase 2) • end-line supported in possible next phase (around 2028/29) <p>Technical and capacity building support will be provided to systematise an ASLO function in MoES.</p> <p>Formative and summative assessment tools will be developed and incorporated in curriculum related materials and resources (e.g. teacher resource packs, teacher guides) and in teacher development approaches.</p>

⁵ Support to summative assessment will cover a range of established assessment (e.g. semester tests). Support will not be provided to develop/revise systems for end of cycle external examinations (Grade 5 examinations are implemented at primary level)

Scope and main activities	Rationale and Key Issues
1.4 Spoken Lao Language Program, to improve learning outcomes for children who enter primary school not speaking Lao – a significant equity issue	Phase 1 pilot is a major opportunity to scale up strategies to improve early grade literacy and improved primary student learning outcomes. Support to a Spoken Lao Language Program is envisaged. Scope and detailed design will be informed by the results of the pilot (due in mid-2021).

2. Teacher professional development (IO2)

Phase 2 will provide technical support to assist MoES with *planning and designing selected aspects of the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) system*. Phase 1 assisted MoES to develop the Lao Primary Teaching Standards in 2018. The teaching standards will underpin design and implementation of the TPD system as a means to guide professional development.

The ESSDP outlines strong commitment to moving forward on three key aspects that will guide the BEQUAL 2 approach. Firstly, as part of a more holistic system, high priority is given to building national capacity and systems for teacher in-service training and school-based continuing professional development (CPD). Secondly, the role of TTCs will be expanded to be responsible for supporting in-service training. Thirdly, strengthening the capacity of both pedagogical advisers to support teachers, and school principals for supporting teaching and learning in schools, are high priorities. The focus on different types of professional development, and for a range of key personnel, constitutes a holistic approach to improving teaching quality.

A key feature of Phase 2 will be to support three Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and targeted districts within the TTCs catchment areas. This will facilitate (and test) the important link between the role of the TTC in providing types of in-service training, and the development and implementation of school-based CPD approaches, supported by DESBs. Support will be provided to develop capacity for *designing and delivering INSET courses for teachers and pedagogical advisers* in the targeted districts. INSET design will emphasise a focused, tailored and targeted approach, significantly different to large scale face to face training for all teachers. Over time it is envisaged that TTCs will build up a ‘menu’ of INSET courses, including modular approaches, that may be adapted and delivered in response to demand. Approaches to TTC INSET delivery will be developed based on careful consideration of cost efficiencies and learning effectiveness. BEQUAL will assist MoES to establish a platform for lesson learning and sharing good practice across TTCs as a basis for scaling up national INSET course delivery through all eight TTCs nationally.

In addition, Phase 2 will provide technical support to MoES and TTCs to improve the *Advanced Teaching Diploma upgrading course* for existing teachers, to align course content and teaching approaches with the full-time pre-service course revised under Phase 1 (and aligned to the new school curriculum). Building on substantial technical work undertaken in Phase 1, support required will be relatively modest. The program will consider supporting the participation of teachers from disadvantaged and remote areas, and female teachers (through scholarships or subsidies).

There is increasing international recognition that sustained follow up support after teacher professional development training, through processes of mentoring and provision of materials and resources to help teachers practice and apply what they have learned, will significantly increase the effectiveness of training. Post training support and resources for teachers will be key to ensuring that new curriculum materials and pedagogical approaches can be applied in the classroom, significantly increasing the likelihood that teachers will change their teaching practice.

Phase 2 will support MoES in *CPD system development including design of specific technical approaches*. This will build on Phase 1 support for developing and testing CPD approaches. INSET design (above) will include resources for school-based CPD, and also aspects of specific INSET courses will include training in CPD approaches, particularly for PAs. This is envisaged to be the main way in which TTCs will support school-based CPD, recognising that TTCs are too distant from schools to facilitate CPD. Strengthening the school cluster network is a key MoES policy priority outlined in the ESSP. Phase 2 will take a practical and case by case

approach to cluster-based CPD, supporting clusters where they can provide an effective platform for teacher CPD, but recognising where they cannot.

An increasing use of *ICT as a means of supporting teacher CPD* is envisaged, reducing the need for large scale and expensive F2F training approaches. There is an increasing body of research and practice related to the use of ICT for teacher development in developing countries. Key aspects include providing teachers with comprehensive digital resources, for example on particular aspects of the curriculum, including specific subject-related pedagogy, and also supporting coaching and mentoring relationships and professional learning networks, within a framework of CPD. Support will be provided to plan, design, test and implement innovative approaches, with an emphasis on practical and cost-effective solutions, and drawing on evidence of what works well in similar contexts. Likely constraints to ICT access in remote areas of Laos will be taken into account to ensure that use of ICT for teacher development does not reinforce or worsen existing disparities, supporting teachers in urban areas while leaving those in rural remote areas behind.

Figure 4: Summary of IO2 - Teacher Professional Development

Scope and main activities	Rationale and Key Issues
2.1 Technical support to DTE/MoES for Teacher Professional Development (TPD) policy, strategy and systems.	It is expected that MoES will make further progress on TPD strategy and systems prior to Phase 2. In this respect a flexible approach, coordinated with other DP support, will be necessary. Support will focus on areas of BEQUAL ‘comparative advantage’, building on its strengths
2.2. Support DTE to develop the role and capacity of TTCs, including targeted support to three TTCs for INSET design and delivery (for teachers and PAs) for targeted districts	Phase 2 cannot cover nationwide training - it will be focused on the targeted districts in the 3 TTC catchment areas TTC F2F INSET (run at TTCs and also likely provincial/district centres) will be linked to follow up through school-based CPD approaches (see below)
2.3 Advanced Teaching Diploma upgrading course	Improving the advanced diploma upgrading course, aligned with the full-time course revised under Phase 1, is a sound investment for improving the competency of in-service teachers.
2.4 Support to school based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) CPD system development, design, testing and implementation of specific CPD approaches at school and cluster level in target districts	Phase 1 is assisting MoES with CPD system development in 2021/22, to be continued in Phase 2. Development of CPD approaches will draw on some existing Phase 1 approaches. CPD will complement TTC INSET (see above) Envisaged that ICT will be an important part of CPD Clusters will have a role in supporting CPD where feasible

3. Teacher management and support (IO3)

Phase 2 will support policy and systems development, and capacity building, in areas that will strengthen the enabling environment for improved teaching. This will focus on aspects of planning and management at the district and school levels with a clear focus on supporting the development of teachers and mobilising resources for teaching and learning. In this sense activities are linked to, and will complement curriculum implementation (IO1) and teacher development (IO2).

An important outcome in ESSDP 2021-15 is strengthened capacity of principals for improving teaching and learning in schools. Relative to teacher training programs in Laos, little attention has been given to principals’ capacity development in the area of teaching and learning. Phase 2 will provide support to MoES and the three TTCs to develop and deliver *school principals capacity building programs* through INSET within the enhanced and expanded mandate of the TTCs. Support will be provided through the same approaches as outlined under IO2, including course and materials design and funding for implementation of selected courses. The technical focus of training will be subject to specific needs analysis and design, although in broad terms will focus on

instructional leadership, likely including increasing principals’ understanding of pedagogical approaches and also their skills in mentoring teachers and supporting positive changes in teaching practices.

Phase 2 will provide technical and financial support to the DESBs in the targeted districts for analysing, planning and implementing activities that will support improved teaching. Support will be provided to build capacity in the use of the *Fundamental Quality Standards (FQS)* for primary schools including the role of DESB staff in supporting schools to undertake FQS assessment and school development planning. FQS is a school self-assessment diagnostic tool for guiding holistic development of the school with the ultimate aim of improving student learning outcomes. It is expected that a clear link will be established between the implementation of FQS processes and demand-driven and needs-based teacher professional development support from BEQUAL – both TTC led INSET and school-based CPD (outlined above). The process of undertaking individual school assessments and developing school profiles across the district will support DESBs in their prioritization of schools needing most support (i.e. under performing schools), in identifying targeted support packages based on identified needs as captured in school development plans, and in prioritising and allocating budgets.

Besides knowledge and skills, changes in teachers’ behaviour and practices are more likely to take place if incentives are provided, motivation is increased and opportunities for better performance are created, offered and when fulfilled, rewarded. Furthermore, teacher professional development programs will be more effective when linked to opportunities for career progression, such as promotion and/or increases in remuneration. Within this context, Phase 2 will retain flexibility to respond to emerging *teacher management policy*. BEQUAL will actively engage in policy dialogue related to teacher management issues and explore opportunities for support, working closely with other development partner programs (in particular GPE III⁶ that includes support to teacher performance appraisal).

Figure 5: Summary of IO3 - Teacher Management and Support

Scope and main activities	Rationale and Key Issues
3.1 Support DTE to develop the role and capacity of TTCs, including targeted support to three TTCs for school principals INSET design and delivery for targeted districts	Focused on the principals’ ‘technical’ role in teaching quality assurance within schools and instructional leadership. This is a ‘distinct’ area not supported by other DPs. Delivery approaches will be similar to TTC INSET under IO2 Envisaged that forms of principals CPD may be developed (e.g. through cluster networks, supported by materials/ ICT)
3.2 Capacity development for targeted DESBs to support improved teaching and learning	Including capacity building in the use of FQS as a diagnostic and needs identification tool for school improvement focused on quality and learning outcomes BEQUAL will focus on the technical aspects (teaching and learning) rather than administrative, for example the DESB may identify teacher development needs to TTCs through the FQS process Support will be coordinated with other DPs supporting FQS (GPE III, UNICEF)
3.3. Support to teacher management policy	Flexible support to the development, trialling and implementation of teacher management policies in response to context and emerging needs Noting that GPE III will address key aspects including teacher deployment and teacher performance appraisal

Targeting approach

A key feature of Phase 2 targeting is to support districts within the catchment area of the three TTCs to be supported (from 8 TTCs nationally), to facilitate the important link between the TTCs in providing types of in-service training, and the development and implementation of school-based CPD approaches. Targeted districts will be provided with support for IO2 and IO3 activities described above, with selected districts also receiving

⁶ Lao PDR Global Partnership for Education III: Learning and Equity Acceleration Project, funded through the

support for the Spoken Lao Language program⁷. Disadvantaged districts will be supported based on a composite of key education performance indicators, thus targeting lower performance and capacity limitations, and focusing on equity. The 40 districts provided with support for teacher development by GPE III will not be supported. Selected BEQUAL Phase 1 districts that meet these criteria will be supported, to enable measurement of progress and impact of BEQUAL 1 into BEQUAL 2 and also to build on relevant Phase 1 approaches in these districts. Selection will ensure a geographical spread of districts across regions.

It is proposed that 29 districts, in 7 out of 18 provinces, within the catchment areas of Luangnamtha, Khangkhai, and Savannakhet TTCs be supported, including 10 of the Phase 1 districts. The districts have 2,070 primary schools, around 6,800 teachers and approximately 141,000 students. The districts have a higher than average percentage of multi-grade classrooms and 18 of the districts have predominantly non-Lao speaking populations.

Funding and reporting mechanisms for supporting district level activities will take into account experiences and lessons learned from Phase 1. It is envisaged that a funding arrangement similar to the Education Support Grants (ESGs) may be appropriate. The feasibility of increasing funding to districts that can demonstrate effective utilisation and results will be considered.

E. Implementation Arrangements and Delivery Approach

A partnership with a suitable Managing Contractor (MC) will be established to deliver BEQUAL 2. The BEQUAL Phase 1 experience has shown that this model offers efficiency, flexibility and the ability to operate at a fast pace and implement activities at central, provincial and district levels, sometimes with tight timeframes and in a low-capacity environment while upholding stringent fiduciary and delivery standards. It also provides Post with the necessary assurances and the ability to manage program implementation in line with DFAT standards and priorities. Post will continue to manage the program in an adaptive manner, relying on the MC for the day-to-day operations while periodically revisiting the program theory and continuously adapting program directions and implementation to evolving performance and context.

Post's education team will maintain oversight of investment implementation to ensure quality, visibility and compliance with DFAT standards, while focusing on policy advocacy and dialogue around key issues linked to teaching quality and student learning. These issues and respective strategy will be identified and developed by Post, in line with the directions and priorities of relevant DFAT cooperation strategies in Lao PDR. Post's education team will seek to contract an independent Technical Advisory Group (TAG) that will include education and MEL expertise to support its engagement on education policy, programming and M&E.

A new program governance arrangement will be negotiated with the GoL to ensure strategic discussions are held and lessons are shared regularly, with a view to adapting and improving program implementation. The proposed arrangement would consist of annual strategic meetings (chaired at ministerial level by MoES) and quarterly technical committee meetings with Provincial Education and Sports Services, Teacher Training Colleges, Director Generals of key Departments of MoES, MC, and DFAT. Intentional efforts will be made on women's representation and leadership within the program's organisational structure, especially in key roles. Reviewing progress of GEDSI strategy and action plans will be a standing agenda item in these meetings.

Through its role as co-chair of the ESWG, Post will continue to play a leadership role in policy dialogue with the GoL on challenging reform issues relevant to our education investment, including education financing, equity and quality issues. A policy dialogue matrix will be developed. Post will continue to coordinate closely with other key development partners to education including the European Union, JICA, UNICEF, USAID, and the World Bank. Australia will also continue to develop and nurture close partnerships in other relevant sectors to lobby and support GoL on relevant reforms of public service delivery. For example, Australia will support a series of World Bank-led Public Finance Management (PFM) capacity development activities for GoL, including a focus on improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of education spending

⁷ This targeted support is in addition to nationwide provision of curriculum materials and INSET under MOI

A COVID-19 strategy will be developed, outlining measures that will be mainstreamed across all Phase 2 activities. This will include measures to deliver the necessary services with appropriate standards of health, hygiene and safety. It will also, when possible, shape activities to increase awareness of risks and improve health and hygiene practices with regards to the nature and spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

BEQUAL 2 has been assessed as medium risk against DFAT's five environmental and social safeguards and overall risk rating. A Risk mitigation strategy will be developed during Phase 2 start-up.

F. Monitoring and Evaluation

The performance of the investment will be closely monitored and evaluated, including at the highest outcome and goal levels. Notably, trends in student learning achievement will be measured by supporting MoES national assessment of grade 3 student learning outcomes (ASLO study) in 2023 or 2024, and using the SEA-PLM grade 5 assessment in 2023.

A Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system will be developed. As an important management tool, the MEL system will seek to ensure accountability of public funds, assess the appropriateness and sufficiency of program's achievements, and identify lessons that can be learned for program improvements and beyond. As such, the objectives of the MEL system are: i) to track and document program implementation performance and progress against plans and budget; ii) to assess the extent to which and how BEQUAL interventions improve students' learning outcomes and inclusive teaching practices; and iii) to identify approaches and factors of success that improve student learning outcomes and inclusive teaching practices.

The MEL system will follow DFAT M&E standards. It will be strategic by design: key performance questions will guide the structure and methodologies of the system, and a Results Framework will provide benchmarks against which success can be established. To answer the key questions, the system will include and clearly articulate three distinct and complementary functions: a monitoring, an evaluation and a learning function. These functions will generate evidence of contextual and program performance that can be acted upon. They will identify baseline measures and track changes across all levels of the program logic and important assumptions, aggregating activity-level data to measure and describe the program's contribution to the EOPO achievement. Specific resources have been budgeted (AUD 500,000 per year) for MEL expertise and activities.

To complement ongoing in-program MEL, Post will seek to convene six-monthly reflection workshops (DFAT and Managing Contractor) to coincide with the submission of progress reports. Discussions will cover contextual changes and program achievements, and review the theory of action, confirm program directions and identify lessons and their application in program activities. A DFAT-managed Phase 2 Mid Term Review will be conducted in 2024. The review will assess program strategic performance, including progress achieved, constraints and risks, and suggest forward directions for the latter years of Phase 2 and a possible program extension.

In addition, DFAT's Education Development Section is supporting a multi-country and multi-year evaluation of teacher development investments, including in Lao PDR. This evaluation, focused on grades 1 and 3, will not only provide evidence of changes in teaching practices but also in student literacy learning outcomes. Evaluation results (mid and end-line) will be representative of all BEQUAL Phase 1 32 targeted districts. This will contribute to measurement of Phase 1 program performance and also to inform Phase 2 program planning and specific approaches.

G. Gender, Disability and Other Cross Cutting Issues

Building upon BEQUAL's achievements in Phase 1, the program will continue to focus on gender and inclusive education issues, speaking directly to Australia's values of promoting gender equality, disability and social inclusion and human rights. Phase 1 approaches, such as incorporating GEDSI in curriculum materials and support to Spoken Lao Language, will be continued. GEDSI will be mainstreamed throughout each intermediate outcome. Targeted activities will have the potential to demonstrate a pathway to a more inclusive education system. In Phase 2 greater attention will be given to linking activities to 'higher-level' impact. This will require, a) strengthening monitoring and evaluation related to GEDSI, b) linking activities more clearly to MoES policy issues and ensuring clearer relevance to MoES and related partners, and c) directly advocating to senior level MoES on mainstreaming GEDSI.

A GEDSI strategy will be developed within the first six-months of Phase 2 commencement. The strategy will be guided by the following objectives: i) to prioritise gender, disability and inclusion equality by facilitating equity measures, ii) to prioritise gender, disability and inclusion equality by amplifying intersectional women's voices, rights & leadership, and iii) to prioritise gender, disability and inclusion equality by strengthening gender equality, disability and inclusion capacity strengthening & awareness raising.

GEDSI will be a standing agenda item in relevant meetings. Reporting should be against the program's GEDSI Strategy with quantitative and qualitative indicators to accurately portray a narrative of behaviour change. Efforts will be taken to Do No Harm by mitigating GEDSI risks to beneficiaries, engaging men and boys to actively engage in GEDSI discussions and activities, and aiming to create a space where underrepresented groups have a safe and supported public dialogue platform from which to speak. Around two per cent of the program budget (AUD 140,000 per year) has been allocated for GEDSI expertise and activities where relevant.