



METIS
ANALYTICS

BEQUAL PHASE 1
END OF PROGRAM REVIEW
FINAL REPORT

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The content of this report reflects the opinions of the EPR team.

¹ The Review Team was composed of a Review Leader (David Hagan), a Lao Education Specialist (Lon Phommathep), a GEDSI Specialist (Robin Mauney) and a Program Performance Specialist (Laurent de Schoutheete). Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, the Review Leader had to discontinue his engagement during the process and the other team members had to complete the review without him.

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MAIN ACRONYMS

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ASLO	Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
BEIF	BEQUAL Education Innovation Fund
BNC	BEQUAL NGO Consortium
BRT	BEQUAL Regional Team
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
DG	Director General
DGE	Department of General Education
DOF	Department of Finance
DOI	Department of Inspection
DOP	Department of Planning
DTE	Department of Teacher Education
EAF	Enquiry and Analytical Framework
EOPO	End of Program Outcomes
EPR	End of Program Review
ESSDP	Education and Sports Sector Development Plan
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
ETSP	Ethnic Teacher Scholarship Program
EU	European Union
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
G&IE	Gender Equality and Inclusive Education
GoA	Government of Australia
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
HOM	Head of Mission (Australian Embassy)
IEC	Inclusive Education Centre
IEPC	Inclusive Education Promotion Centre
INSET	In-Service Training
IO	Intermediate Outcome
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KRA	Key Result Area
LADLF	Laos Australia Development Learning Facility
LESMIS	Lao Education and Sports Management Information System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MT	Master Trainer
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PA	Pedagogical Advisor
PTDC	Provincial Teacher Development Centre
PESS	Provincial Education and Sports Service
PT	Provincial Trainer
RIES	Research Institute for Educational Sciences
SLP	Spoken Lao Pilot
ToR	Terms of Reference
TRP	Teacher Resource Packs
TTC	Teacher Training College
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive Summary

The Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR program (BEQUAL) is a DFAT-funded investment designed to support the Government of Lao PDR to ensure more students, especially from disadvantaged groups, are literate and have the life skills to join a productive and stable workforce. With a total budget of AUD 80 million over seven years (May 2015- June 2022), the first phase of BEQUAL (BEQUAL Phase 1) began as a large program covering a wide range of fields across the basic education sub-sector. Following a mid-term review in 2017, the program was reframed to service the objectives of the national primary curriculum reform, and the improvement of teachers' and education managers' skills to implement the new curriculum. To document the program's evolution and achievements, and draw lessons for the second phase (BEQUAL Phase 2, starting in July 2022), DFAT has commissioned an independent End of Program Review (EPR) of BEQUAL Phase 1.

This Report presents the high-level findings and conclusions of the EPR process. These have been developed based on the review of key documents and a series of consultations with key informants. The Review has considered a wide range of stakeholders' perspectives, including representatives from DFAT, GoL, provincial and district authorities, primary school teachers, and relevant development partners (DPs) and non-governmental organisations in Lao PDR. Due to sanitary risks and restrictions, all consultations (conducted in January and February 2022) were conducted online.

The EPR findings presented in the report are structured around key evaluation criteria suggested in the Review's Terms of Reference: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL); Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI); and agility and adaptation. The conclusions outline eight key messages that synthesise the findings and offer an informed reflection on the BEQUAL Phase 1 experience and achievements. These are:

- BEQUAL Phase 1 is a flexible and adaptive program that has responded flexibly and strategically to major changes in context and priorities, while maintaining the quality and relevance of support to MoES.
- The program has remained relevant in the context of Lao PDR throughout Phase 1, and has firmed up an identity around the teaching quality agenda that offers a strong platform upon which further support can be built.
- BEQUAL Phase 1 has produced substantial achievements, most notably the development and implementation of modern national primary curricula for core subjects (Grades 1-4) and the development of a new teacher training system.
- The program has a strong focus on gender equality and inclusive education, less on disability inclusion.
- The program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) function has improved over time, effectively strengthened MoES MEL processes, and focused on tracking operational performance.
- The Program has had a positive impact on improving stakeholders' capacities and relevant MoES processes, and evidence of changes at the classroom level and student learning outcomes is growing.
- DFAT has continued to promote collaborative relationships with like-minded initiatives and development partners with mixed responses and results.

- The program's political dividends, in terms of policy dialogue and influence on the GoL policy agenda, is mitigated or at best unclear.

The Report concludes with five strategic lessons and concrete suggestions to consider for Phase 2 (July 2022 – June 2026):

1. Working with GoL : Establish and strengthen relationships with key MoES officials and engage them in strategic/policy dialogue, with a view to: foster GoL funding, ownership and leadership of BEQUAL-supported reforms; identify key approaches to these reforms; and improve vertical and horizontal coordination between MoES departments and stakeholders at sub-national levels.
2. Teacher CPD System: Encourage and support MoES to include clear roles and responsibilities in the CPD system design, both for internal stakeholders (particularly TTC and PESS) and between supportive development partners.
3. Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI): Develop and implement a clear, pragmatic and well-resourced GEDSI strategy, informed by appropriate GEDSI assessments and focused on developing and actively supporting teaching practices that promote GEDSI.
4. Program MEL function: Design a MEL system that can be utilised as a strategic management tool, providing performance information beyond operational accountability and covering contextual evolutions, lessons around replication and scalability, and ultimately results in classrooms.
5. Collaborating with other development partners (DPs): Provide strong leadership to build, formally and informally, a coalition of like-minded DPs ready and willing to harmonise their investments, work collaboratively and engage jointly with GoL on relevant policy agendas.

I. Introduction

1. Background

The Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR (BEQUAL) program is Australia’s flagship program supporting primary education in Lao PDR. BEQUAL was conceived as a 10-year partnership between the Government of Australia (GoA) and the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) that contributes to Lao PDR’s stability and prosperity by ensuring more students, especially from disadvantaged groups, are literate and numerate and have the life skills to join a productive and stable workforce.

The first phase of BEQUAL (BEQUAL Phase 1) will cover the period May 2015 - June 2022. It began as a large program covering a wide range of fields across the basic education sub-sector. Following a mid-term review in 2017, the program was reframed to service the objectives of the national primary curriculum reform, and the improvement of teachers’ and education managers’ skills to implement the new curriculum.

As BEQUAL Phase 1 is scheduled to end in June 2022 and a second phase (BEQUAL Phase 2) will start in July 2022, DFAT has commissioned an independent End of Program Review (EPR) to assess the effectiveness and quality of BEQUAL Phase 1.

2. Objectives

The EPR aims to document the program’s evolution and achievements, and synthesise lessons learned from BEQUAL Phase 1. As stated in the ToR (see Annex 1), the purpose of the EPR is to:

1. Assess BEQUAL Phase 1 achievements against the program’s objectives.
2. Reflect on these achievements and draw strategic lessons to feed into the implementation of BEQUAL Phase 2 (2022-2030), including to strengthen the MEL and GEDSI program strategies.

To fulfil these objectives, the Review attempts to answer the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) outlined in the ToR (see Figure 1), based on judgements informed by the collection and analysis of primary and secondary information sourced from relevant literature and consultations with key stakeholders.

Fig. 1 – Key Evaluation Questions

Criteria	KEQ
Relevance	1. How and why have BEQUAL Phase 1 objectives evolved?
Effectiveness	2. To what extent and how has BEQUAL Phase 1 achieved its objectives?
Efficiency	3. To what extent and how has BEQUAL Phase 1 made appropriate use of Australia’s and Lao partners’ time and resources?
MEL	4. How and how well has BEQUAL Phase 1 assessed, learnt from, and improved its performance?
GEDSI	5. How and how well has BEQUAL Phase 1 implementation integrated and achieved results on gender equality, disability and social inclusion?
Agility and adaptation	6. How and how well has BEQUAL Phase 1 pivoted to respond to the Mid-Term Review (MTR) findings and the COVID-19 pandemic?

Lessons learned	7. What are the key lessons from BEQUAL Phase 1 implementation to feed into Phase 2 and beyond?
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The EPR primary audience is the Australian Embassy in Vientiane, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) more broadly, the Australian public, the Lao PDR Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES), and program beneficiaries. The main beneficiaries of the Review report will be the Australian Embassy in Vientiane (Education Section), MoES, and the implementation team of BEQUAL Phase 2. Given the breadth of the audience and users, the review has considered a wide range of stakeholders’ perspectives, including representatives from GoL, provincial and district authorities, development partners (DPs), and relevant non-governmental organisations in Lao PDR.

3. Methodology

The development of the EPR Report has entailed the following steps.

Framing

Following an inception briefing with personnel from DFAT, Australia Embassy Vientiane, the EPR team developed a Review Plan incorporating an Enquiry and Analytical Framework (EAF) and a Consultation Schedule with priority areas of enquiry listed for each group of respondents. The EAF, presented in Annex 3, builds on the KEQ and outlines a series of domains of enquiry (or key aspects of the program) and lines of enquiry (or sub-questions) to consider for each KEQ. It provided a structured framework to guide discussions during the consultation phase and the development of key messages in the analysis phase.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection methods have been applied, drawing from the following sources:

- **Key documents:** A range of key program documents (e.g. Workplans, Progress Reports, MEL and GEDSI Strategies), relevant plans and strategies (e.g. MoES Education and Sports Sector Development Plans - ESSDP), and external evaluations and analyses have been reviewed (see Annex 4). These documents formed the basis for the factual data presented in this report.
- **Key informants:** Key stakeholders consulted included representatives from DFAT in Lao PDR and Australia, MoES, provincial and district education authorities, Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) ², primary school teachers, BEQUAL implementation team, relevant DPs (World Bank, European Union, USAID, UNICEF, JICA), and relevant non-government organisation (NGO) agencies in Lao PDR. Due to sanitary risks and restrictions, all 28 consultation sessions (conducted between 19th January and 17th February 2022) were conducted online. These consultations comprise the bulk of primary data collected: participants received a questionnaire and were asked to prepare and submit a written summary of responses. When available, the responses were used in a semi-structured way during the discussions, to further elaborate on and clarify the information provided by respondents. These EPR consultations aimed to gather a wide range of perspectives on the program, and form the basis of the findings presented in this report.

² Provincial Education and Sports Service (PESS) authorities and TTC consulted: Savannakhet, Luang Namtha and Khammouane. District Education and Sport Bureaus (DESB) consulted: Thapangthong, Outhoumphone, Mahaxay, Boualapha, Sing and Long.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The Enquiry and Analytical Framework (EAF) has guided the analysis and synthesis of data collected to produce key findings. Regular team discussions throughout the data collection phase were undertaken to assimilate emerging trends against the domains and lines of enquiry. At the end of the consultation phase, the EPR team participated in a five-day analytical workshop, where consultation notes were compared and discussed to identify common and exceptional themes, and key findings were developed jointly. The team then synthesised the views of the various stakeholders and applied professional judgement to interpret any divergent perspectives. During this process, team members were encouraged to engage in an open discussion and exchange of views, and ultimately adopted a 'consensus approach' to key messages.

Key preliminary messages were presented to selected DFAT staff at an Aide Memoire online workshop for the purposes of validation and refinement. Feedback on the Aide Memoire presentation was received from the Australian Embassy in Vientiane and incorporated into the EPR draft Review Report.

4. This Report

This Report presents the high-level findings and conclusions of the EPR process. Section II summarises the salient findings, structured around the KEQ criteria: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; MEL; GEDSI; and agility and adaptation. Each sub-section provides a narrative against the KEQ domains and lines of enquiry presented in the EAF. To conclude, Section III presents eight key messages that synthesise the findings, some of which speak to the strengths of the program and others highlight areas of improvement, and five strategic lessons for BEQUAL Phase 2.

II. Findings

1. Relevance

Changes in overall context

Over the past decade, Lao PDR has made significant progress towards achieving universal primary education and gender parity in primary school enrolment, however the quality of education remains a major challenge. High rates of drop-out and grade repetition are persistent problems (MoES, 2020). The results from national and regional assessments in Grade 3 (MoES, 2018), Grade 5 (UNICEF & SEAMEO, 2021³) and Grade 9 (MoES, 2020) show very low levels of proficiency in Lao language and mathematics. Student achievement is generally lower in rural and remote agricultural communities with high concentrations of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Underlying factors include limited exposure to print materials outside of formal schooling and a linguistic mismatch between the Lao language of instruction and students' mother tongue. The Lao education system faces a range of challenges that impact teaching quality. Teaching methods have historically favoured rote learning. The minimum qualification to become a teacher is lower secondary education and the system has struggled to attract and maintain qualified teachers in remote and ethnic areas (LADLF, 2018).

The period of BEQUAL Phase 1 implementation has been characterised by the general tightening of the Lao fiscal space and an increase in public debt, primarily due to government funding diverted away from the social sectors into other priority areas such as large infrastructure projects. This has led to shrinking public expenditures on social services and a right-sizing reform of the Lao civil service. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation, diminishing fiscal strength and weakening the Lao Government's ability to deliver essential services such as education. The impact on public finance is expected to be considerable, with domestic revenue falling from 14 to 10 per cent of GDP in 2020. High deficits have increased public debt with debt servicing projected to reach, on average, 55 per cent of domestic revenue in the medium term (BEQUAL, 2021) - capturing any remaining available fiscal space.

The education system has faced severe constraints characterised by limited financial and human resources, and significant inequity across multiple dimensions including socio-economic and GEDSI. GoL chronic under-funding of the sector has resulted in a severe reduction in quotas for new teacher appointments⁴ and a greater reliance on Development Partners to deliver key education services⁵. As a result, teacher shortages are predicted for all subsectors, leading to an increase in the number of multigrade classes and incomplete schools (BEQUAL 2022). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked widespread school shutdowns and associated reduced teaching hours⁶. These factors have resulted in increased school dropouts and significant learning gaps, particularly in remote areas where remote teaching technologies are still missing and where poorer families have reduced capacity to

³ Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) Main Regional Report, Children's Learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries. UNICEF, SEAMEO, 2020

⁴ The allocation of civil service quota allocations for new teachers is now less than the replacement rate for retirees: new teacher positions are estimated at about 530 while annual loss (resignation and retirement) are approximately about 2000, resulting in a net estimated loss of 1,500 teaching positions each year (figures reported by key respondent).

⁵ In late 2021, MoF requested all sectors to freeze spending under operating budgets (Chapters 62 & 63). The Minister of Education and Sports indicated to the ESWG Chairs that financial constraints would extend until at least the end of 2023.

⁶ In September 2021 MoES announced new measures through the '80% Curriculum Guidelines' to reduce the 2021-22 school year from 33 weeks to 26 weeks, reducing the content to be covered in primary school from eight subjects⁶ to five⁶, and use of remote teaching modalities whenever face-to-face classes are not possible (BEQUAL, 2022).

send their children to school given the increased opportunity costs of labour. It is noted that girls have been more vulnerable to these pressures than boys. Although GoL awareness and focus on exclusion and inequality has increased in recent years, the patriarchal structure of Lao society means women and girls’ vulnerabilities have increased during the pandemic and so has gender inequality around the division of paid and unpaid labour, decision-making, access to essential services and gender-based violence.

Changes in BEQUAL Objectives

The BEQUAL Phase 1 objectives have changed considerably throughout the period of implementation. Two important inflexion points have provided an impetus for restructuring the program logic: 1) the program independent MTR in 2017, and 2) the second contract extension in 2020 that followed the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering these two points, three sub-phases can be considered:

- The first sub-phase 1.1 covers the period from inception (May 2015) to the MTR (August 2017)
- The second sub-phase 1.2 covers the period from MTR (August 2017) to Phase 1 extension (August 2020)
- The third sub-phase 1.3 covers the period from Phase 1 extension (September 2020) until the end of Phase 1 (June 2022).

As illustrated in Figure 2, BEQUAL was initially conceived as a 10-year program, with Phase 1 scheduled to finish mid-2018. The late start and the substantial changes after the MTR led to the first extension of Phase 1 until August 2020. The disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent delay in finalising the design of BEQUAL Phase 2 prompted a second extension of Phase 1 until June 2022, and the potential elongation of the program period up to 15 years (2015-2030).

Fig. 2 – BEQUAL initial and actual timelines

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Initial timeline (Phase 1 Design)																	
Program Preparation	█																
Phase 1		█	█	█	█	█											
Phase 2						█	█	█	█	█							
Phase 3										█	█	█					
Actual timeline (March 2022)																	
Program Preparation	█	█															
Phase 1				Initial Contract			Extension 1		Extension 2								
Phase 2											Initial contract			Potential extension			

Although the program goal has remained mostly stable throughout Phase 1 (noting a focus on literacy in the later years), the program structure and objectives have evolved considerably. Figure 3 below summarises the successive iterations of the Phase 1 high-level objectives and components.

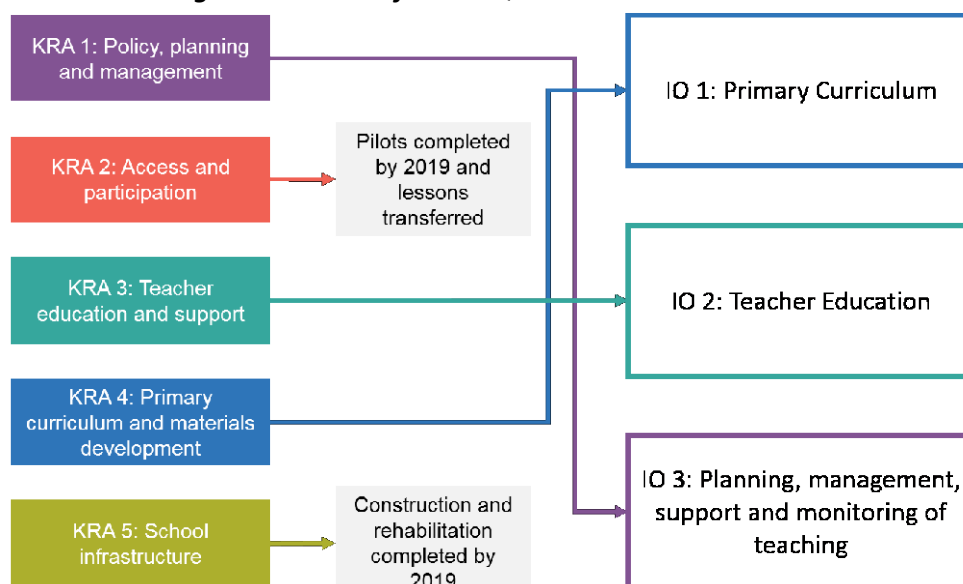
Fig. 3 – Evolution of BEQUAL Program Logic

Sub-Phase	Goal	End of Program Outcomes	Components
1.1	More girls and boys, especially those experiencing disadvantage, complete good quality basic education, achieving literacy, numeracy and other life skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation and access: more disadvantaged children and young people participate on a regular basis in primary education and attend school ready to learn; 2. Resourcing: learning environments in targeted geographic areas are more equitable for all groups and are adequately resourced; 3. Effective teaching: more effective teaching by better qualified teachers enables more disadvantaged girls and boys to learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ KRA 1: Policy, planning and coordination ▪ KRA 2 Increased participation in school ▪ KRA 3: Teacher education and support ▪ KRA 4: School infrastructure upgrades ▪ KRA 5: Development of teaching and learning resources.
1.2	More girls and boys of primary school age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, achieve functional numeracy and literacy and achieve life skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More effective teaching: teachers have improved primary education teaching practices 2. Better governance: MoES, PESS and DESB have strengthened systems to coordinate and manage human, financial and physical resources for primary education teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IO 1: Revising the national primary curriculum ▪ IO 2: Improving pre- and in-service teacher training ▪ IO 3: Strengthening management and monitoring of teaching
1.3	More girls and boys of primary-school age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, achieve functional literacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Better teaching and learning resources: the primary curriculum facilitates active learning 2. More effective teaching: primary teachers have improved teaching practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IO 1: Primary Curriculum ▪ IO 2: Teacher Education

The program was designed in 2012 as part of GoA’s commitment to support the implementation of MoES Education and Sport Sector Development Plans (ESSDP), and in line with DFAT Aid Investment Plan (AIP) for Lao PDR 2015-2020. The initial program logic articulated three End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) to be achieved through wide-ranging activities grouped under five Key Result Areas (KRAs) covering many areas, including school infrastructure, student participation, teacher pre-service and in-service training, and PA capacity building. This was found to be too ambitious in scope. In late 2017, an independent MTR identified the need to refocus the objectives and implementation approach, away from access and participation and towards improving education quality, particularly teaching quality. A range of program activities (e.g. Ethnic Teacher Scholarship Program, BEQUAL NGO Consortium, BEIF grants) were finalised or gradually phased out and a revised program logic was developed.

The post-MTR revised program logic included two EOPO and three Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) and presented a program resolutely focused on the development and implementation of the new primary curriculum and related teacher training activities⁷. It also strengthened the program’s focus on working with District Education and Sport Bureaus (DESBs) to develop their capacity for supporting teachers. Figure 4 illustrates the transition between the five initial KRAs and the three subsequent IOs.

Fig. 4 – Transition from BEQUAL Phase 1 KRAs to IOs



Source: BEQUAL End of Phase 1 Report (2020)

The changes post-MTR led to BEQUAL supporting the production of the new primary curriculum one year behind the JICA-supported development of the primary maths curriculum. This meant BEQUAL could not support the distribution of maths curriculum materials and the respective teacher training schemes were not aligned. Although this posed many challenges, particularly for MoES and subnational stakeholders, there were also unintended benefits: BEQUAL was able to access information and learn from JICA’s experience, and as such, more accurately plan and budget the production and distribution of the curriculum materials and teacher training activities.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 indirectly prompted a second extension (September 2020 – August 2022) of BEQUAL Phase 1. It coincided with the arrival of the 9th GoL Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (ESSDP), with its strong focus on primary education and teacher education, and of DFAT’s COVID-19 Development Response Plan in Lao PDR. It also provided an opportunity to revisit the program logic, in line with these contextual changes. The result was a revised program logic (presented in Annex 2) that included two EOPOs and two IOs, strengthened BEQUAL’s alignment with the government’s objectives⁸, and positioned ‘governance’ support as an enabling activity for teaching quality rather than as an objective on its own.

⁷ Both EOPO were related to the new curriculum. More effective teaching was understood as the alignment of teaching practice with the new curriculum. Better governance referred to the expected increased capacity of government line agencies to support teachers to implement the new curriculum.

⁸ See Results Framework in BEQUAL MEL strategy 2020-222 and Implementation Plan for BEQUAL Phase 1 extension (2020-2022) for explicit linkages between planned BEQUAL activities and ESSDP High Level Outcomes (HLOs), Intermediate Outcomes (IOs), policy actions, strategies and key activities.

Notably, the successive changes of BEQUAL Phase 1 program logic have gradually shifted the program identity towards teaching quality, and reduced its focus on education access and governance priorities. As such, the program ability to operate in a pluralistic, agile and tailored manner diminished, but the program has gained much needed clarity and focus. By targeting a systemic reform championed by the central government in Vientiane, the changes have also framed BEQUAL support in a more supply-driven and top-down model, albeit with activities at the subnational level.

Although change has been a hallmark of the BEQUAL Phase 1 story, the program’s focus on children who are experiencing disadvantage and inclusive education has been constant, whether into curriculum materials, teacher training materials, high level public diplomacy events, governance meetings, MEL efforts or communications campaigns. These priorities have been embedded in the goal statement since inception and remained throughout Phase 1. In summary, teaching quality together with equity and inclusion have been cornerstones of the BEQUAL Phase 1 identity. New and modern primary school curricula, together with a revised teacher training system are the Program’s legacies.

2. Effectiveness

Macro-achievements

From a long-term perspective, BEQUAL Phase 1 has contributed substantially to the establishment of a strong foundation for a modern education system in Lao PDR. The Program has been instrumental in developing and implementing a new national primary curriculum, introducing a pedagogical shift from rote learning to student-centred and active learning. Beyond the factual and direct benefits of the support provided (see below), the demonstrative power of such achievement is not to be underestimated: BEQUAL support has demonstrated how large and complex education reforms can be implemented in Lao PDR through effective and adaptable processes and operations. Furthermore, BEQUAL has positioned Australia as a capable, committed and trustworthy partner of GoL, and as a leader of the group of DPs involved in the education sector in Lao PDR. Finally, it has raised awareness of inclusive and equitable education principles at all levels of education governance, and has successfully embedded these principles in many aspects of the new curriculum - with impacts to be likely felt for years to come. Other achievements reported by the BEQUAL Phase 1 implementation team⁹ are listed in Figure 5 below.

Fig. 5 – Examples of BEQUAL Phase 1 achievements

Categories	Achievements
Strengthened governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for MoES to revise curriculum, teaching standards, pre-service curriculum, national assessment policy, Finance and Administration Management Manual. • Increased use of technology for DESB, PESS and MoES, ASLO study to collect data on student learning outcomes (2017). • Successfully piloting an output-based grant mechanism for target PESS and DESB, including planning and financial management and training of relevant personnel.

⁹ See BEQUAL Progress Report, June 2021 and BEQUAL End of Five Years Report Draft Final, July 2020

Participation especially by disadvantaged children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships and support for ethnic teachers and increase in public service positions. • Infrastructure upgrading for 582 schools in 45 districts and increased participation of students with disabilities. • Literacy development, WASH, and disability inclusion projects achieved through an NGO consortium (BNC). • Development of GEDSI assessment tools for curriculum materials, INSET training materials and communications to ensure inclusion of gender and ethnic diversity, and children with disability.
More effective teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful capacity building of MoES, PESS, DESBs and TTCs for writing curriculum, and enhancing equality and inclusion in the classroom. • New primary curriculum materials for Grades 1, 2 and 3 developed, produced, and distributed: 1,612,000 textbooks, 246,400 teacher guides, for 320,102 students, and 25,845 teachers and principals in 8823 schools. • 30,282 in-service training handbooks and 11 teaching demonstration videos produced. • 60 Master Trainers (MTs) and 930 Provincial Trainers (PTs) trained to instruct 9,662 grade one teachers and non-teaching principals, and grades two and three teachers.
Teaching and learning resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production and distribution of 18,470 teacher resource packs (TRPs) to 9,105 Grade 1 classrooms and 9,365 Grade 2 classrooms. • Development/distribution of 510,205 storybooks and 1,223,645 decodable readers. • Materials broadcast on Lao National TV to support the new Grade 1 curriculum during the school closure period in response to COVID-19. • Successful development of a new pre-service primary PD curriculum, aligned with the new primary curriculum and in-service teacher training.
Infrastructure upgrading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation and repair of existing classrooms in 389 schools. • Construction of new classrooms and latrines, and classroom rehabilitation through Community Based Construction (CBC) activities in ETSP target villages for 166 schools. • Provision of school furniture sets including teacher and student desks and chairs, and blackboard in ETSP target schools for 141 schools. • Improved WASH infrastructure and WASH training in ETSP target schools in 121 schools.

Constraints and challenges

The BEQUAL Phase 1 program has fronted a number of significant constraints, ranging from uncertain and reduced GoL budget for supporting necessary activities¹⁰, a tight timeframe for annual cycles of curriculum implementation, the lack of coordination between central and sub-national levels, and MoES departments' competing interests and priorities¹¹. Given its centrality in the BEQUAL approach, the issue of MoES capacity building is a significant challenge. The program has indeed had to continuously navigate the inherent tensions between delivering a stringent set of expected deliverables (on time and with high standards), and the need to slow down implementation to foster ownership and build capacities of colleagues in MoES departments – some of which are prone to rapid turnover of personnel and therefore need continuous support to upskill new staff. These tensions are ongoing and have become part of BEQUAL modus operandi.

A number of activities have been suspended or phased out, for different reasons. For instance, the ETSP was scaled back from three cohorts to two (although the two cohorts graduated in three waves)¹². The program started supporting DTE to develop a national in-service training (INSET) framework, but that support was halted to wait for DTE to develop a new comprehensive teacher policy with support from UNESCO. Any in-service framework would need to align with and be drawn from this teacher policy, and development of this policy is still ongoing. The list goes on and, although undesirable, it also indicates BEQUAL's ability to adapt through trial and error, whilst persisting with attempts to fill the numerous gaps of the sub-sector.

Perceived issues raised during consultations have been the sub-optimal level and nature of coordination between DPs active in basic education, and more broadly the limited access to GoL decision-makers and influence on education policies generated by the BEQUAL investment. Both points are linked and deserve greater attention going forward. The first point, i.e. lack of effective donor collaboration, necessitates a solid coalition-building effort that would likely require reforming - or at least reinvesting - existing fora such as the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG). Given the continued presence of many DPs in the sector, strong coalitions with a common agenda and reinforcing activities should provide a platform for improved policy dialogue with GoL. To be successful in this endeavour, in the context of Lao PDR, the second point likely necessitates stronger relationships with key senior officials and ministers, identification of key policy issues which may be open to influence, whilst creating opportunities, through these relationships, for dialogue on the issues at stake.

¹⁰ For instance, GoL funding for the production and distribution of non-supported curriculum materials for grades 4-5, and training activities on those subjects for grades 3- remains unclear. BEQUAL funding has covered nationwide training on BEQUAL subjects for grades 3-5.

¹¹ See BEQUAL End of Five Years report (2020)

¹² Through this initiative, BEQUAL has supported the training of 364 ethnic teachers (63% females) across three cohorts¹², out of which 359 (63% female) have graduated as teachers committed to their communities, able to speak in Lao and ethnic languages, and wanting to make a difference to children's learning. However, GoL budget cuts and reduced quota positions for teachers increased the competition among existing volunteers and jeopardized the employment prospects of ETSP graduates. While no longer able to guarantee teaching positions for ETSP teachers, MoES - encouraged by DFAT - has nevertheless demonstrated commitment to the program by ring-fencing quota positions for ETSP graduates each year. By July 2020, 328 ETSP graduates (63% females) were teaching. Seventy civil service quota positions were allocated to ETSP graduates in 2021 and thirty in 2022, representing six percent of all positions allocated to the education sector in 2021-22.

Primary curriculum

Despite the many challenges faced in the production and distribution of curriculum materials – due to COVID-19 restrictions and/or financial constraints - the delivery and implementation of the new national primary curriculum has largely been achieved on schedule. The curriculum rollout began with Grade 1 in September 2019. By end of 2021, the new curriculum for Grades 1, 2 and 3, had been fully developed and rolled-out nationally and the new Grade 4 curriculum was 90% developed. It is expected that Grade 4 materials will be distributed by June 2022, as planned.

The new curriculum materials include a wide range of supplementary teaching and learning resources that follow student-centred, inclusive and active learning approaches, to complement the core curriculum content: e.g. storybooks, decodable readers and busy pictures. In addition, there are practical teacher guides and training resources and post-training self- and peer-learning resources (e.g. Teacher Development Videos).

BEQUAL support has reportedly enabled MoES/RIES to develop capacities across curriculum writing, layout and production, procurement processes, distribution planning, IT skills, development and production of teacher development videos, production of supplementary teaching and learning materials, and communications campaign development and production. Other additional benefits include:

- The enabling environment for curriculum development, production and distribution has improved: e.g. there is better coordination between RIES and Asset Management Division (DoF) and a smoother process for getting tax free import of materials produced overseas.
- Gender equality and inclusive education (G&IE) assessment and review processes are now integrated into the curriculum development process, including both content development and illustrations. It is expected that curriculum writers will now be able to develop Grade 5 material packages with minimal technical assistance and oversight from BEQUAL specialists.¹³
- More practical guidance has been provided on how to produce teaching and learning resources using locally available materials.

To reach the curriculum development and distribution targets, many challenges (mostly related to MoES/RIES limited resources and absorptive capacity) had to be overcome. These include:

- Limited MoES budget for printing and delivery of material packages, and at times opaque approval process and systems.
- Other DPs funding and developing other curriculum (secondary, foreign languages) competing for the same MoES resources.
- Low resourced work environment for the technology-heavy demand of producing print-ready textbooks and teacher guides.
- Assignment of new, unqualified personnel to RIES curriculum writing teams at the start of each new grade, instead of continuing with experienced personnel.
- COVID-19 lockdowns affecting production process (publishing/printing companies unable to operate during lockdown), writing process (writing team workshops having to take place online), and distribution process (delivery of materials produced in Thailand delayed; inter-provincial travel restrictions and localised lockdowns forcing multiple changes to distribution schedules).

¹³ This is based on curriculum writers' self-rated capacity.

In terms of impact, BEQUAL support has demonstrated substantial short-term benefits for the development and distribution of curricula materials. In the longer perspective, it will take time for these benefits to percolate down to classroom level, i.e. for teachers to absorb and use the new tools and approaches and change their behaviour and, ultimately, for students' learning outcomes to improve, especially in remote areas.

Teacher education

BEQUAL Phase 1 has invested substantially in supporting MoES to align primary teaching standards, pre-service education and in-service training, and the new primary curriculum framework. The support provided included technical advice and direct funding for scholarships, training workshops, innovative learning resources, production and distribution of pre-service curriculum and in-service training materials, and co-planning and management of nationwide pre-service and in-service training. Notable achievements during the BEQUAL Phase 1 period include:

- In-service teacher training on the new curriculum successfully delivered to all Grades 1, 2 and 3 primary teachers and primary PAs nationwide¹⁴, including during COVID period.
- Initial selection and training of the Master and Provincial Trainer teams undertaken. Annual review of the MT and PT teams has successfully promoted increased female participation each year, with the number of female trainers included in the teams increasing from 39% for Grade 1 to 45% for Grade 4.
- In-semester teacher support capacity and activities have been supported in eligible target districts (currently 28 districts) working with PAs, PTs and other district staff (although there are 34 BEQUAL target districts, 6 already receive grants from UNICEF so they are not eligible for BEQUAL grants by agreement with UNICEF).
- The revised pre-service curriculum has been fully developed, piloted, approved by DTE and distributed. It is aligned to the primary curriculum and promotes active learning and inclusive education.
- District grants were successfully provided to 28 target districts to support the implementation of in-semester teacher support activities, provide pedagogical support, and use remote data collection tools.¹⁵

BEQUAL support has reportedly built the capacity of PESS, DESB and school level staff to identify and address issues with teaching quality and improved the quality of teacher pedagogical support. However, due to restricted budget, the program was unable to support all districts of Lao PDR, and some EPR respondents have highlighted the disparities between BEQUAL targeted districts and other non-target districts. The program also had to balance its support to respond to short-term needs for in-service training to enable existing teachers to use the new curriculum, and longer-term needs to build the foundation of the next generation of teachers through pre-service teacher education. Other challenges and constraints of BEQUAL support to teacher education have reportedly included:

- The limited MoES budget for teacher training and development and the gradual reductions of the BEQUAL budget for teacher training and development activities.

¹⁴ BEQUAL has trained all subjects for G1 and G2. For G3, the training covered Science and Environment, Lao Language, English and Physical Education.

¹⁵ The tools introduced by BEQUAL (tablets, KoBo toolbox) are now being picked up by other Departments and DPs (in particular the new FQS process being piloted by LEQA with UNICEF support)

- The limited technical capacity of DTE and sub-national teacher education stakeholders coupled with their limited absorptive capacity due to heavy workload.
- Lack of relevant MoES policy and/or guidance for teacher professional development systems and processes.
- Overlapping and/or competing DP programs or activities (e.g. UNICEF provides a parallel program in six target districts), and insufficient coordination and/or information-sharing practices.
- Limited district capacity for providing pedagogical support to teachers in terms of technical capacity/skills, inadequate structures (PAs roles unclear) and budget.
- The impacts of COVID-19 on teacher motivation, mental health and wellbeing, and increased household duties.
- The lack of TTC involvement in teacher training/development due to limited budget and poor coordination with PESS.
- The poor and uncoordinated functioning of Provincial Teacher Development Centres (PTDCs).

In terms of impact, beyond the number of teachers upskilled¹⁶, the program has supported DTE to develop and trial a range of new approaches to a teacher Continuous Professional Development (CPD) system.¹⁷ The foundation has been laid for developing a comprehensive CPD system: DTE and other key stakeholders (especially TTCs) have developed an understanding of the value and purpose of CPD and a variety of CPD modalities. It has also reinforced for teachers, Principals and PAs, the importance of reflective practice and professional development. Although the new CPD model presents a departure from previous practice, MoES has endorsed it and issued an edict to all TTCs in late 2021 to introduce and implement it in all provinces¹⁸. It is still early days and the CPD model has yet to be operationalised at sub-national level¹⁹: whether the new system will be broadened and applied beyond curriculum training activities remains to be seen.

3. Efficiency

Implementation approach

Beyond conventional technical advisory services, BEQUAL has employed a range of modalities including small grants mechanisms, an NGO consortium, a scholarship program (for ethnic teachers), and the direct procurement of printing and distribution services. One recurrent debate around the BEQUAL approach has been the tension that exist between the program's commitment to capacity development and its imperative to adopt a service delivery approach. This debate is not new: the 2017 MTR suggests it extends back to the design phase when the fundamental rationale for BEQUAL was

¹⁶ According to the BEQUAL End of Five Year Report (September 2020), classroom observations of 1675 Grade 1 teachers carried out in target DESBs indicate positive uptake of the new curriculum and pedagogy so far, with 71% of teachers found to be demonstrating desired teaching practices 'all of the time' (18%) or 'most of the time' (53%); 97% of teachers were observed to be using the new Teacher Guides, and 95% of teachers were observed to be using supplementary resources.

¹⁷ These have included the decentralised and cascading model of training activities that BEQUAL had introduced in previous years as part of the curriculum support provided by PAs and DESBs to teachers.

¹⁸ DTE has incorporated it into its 3-year subsector plan, and has issued a decree that establishes a new division in each TTC whose role it is to provide ongoing teacher support and development.

¹⁹ Some consultations during the EPR process have revealed misunderstandings and lack of communication between TTCs, PESS and DESB staff with regards to the system and respective responsibilities.

not universally agreed within DFAT, thus setting up an ‘existential ambiguity’ about program purpose. Though it notes that both ‘direct delivery’ and ‘capacity strengthening’ approaches could co-exist, it suggests that BEQUAL Phase 1 was ‘subtly oriented towards direct delivery rather than capacity strengthening’ (p. vi). Fast forwarding a few years, the EPR team has come to a similar conclusion: although the approach adopted by BEQUAL has been multiple and mixed, differing from activity to activity and evolving over time, given the resource and time constraints, the program has had to, overall, prioritised service delivery over capacity building in order to ensure the continuous grade by grade delivery of the new curriculum. As noted by the implementation team, where there was an attempt to reduce BEQUAL international advisers, it has been difficult to maintain timeframes and quality service delivery.

As a result, capacity-building outcomes have varied across IO areas, and have also been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. It is nevertheless clear that when conditions were conducive (i.e. when partners were willing, available and ready to learn) BEQUAL has effectively built capacities. These efforts have not focused solely on technical skills, but also on organisational, coordination and communication skills. Examples of reported achievements include:

- Capacities of the RIES curriculum writing and Lao Language team to work online: the curriculum writing activities initially moved to online workshops by necessity, but then generated unexpected benefits for teamwork and a broader understanding across writing teams of lesson content and how they link.
- Capacities of RIES media and e-learning teams to develop videos through on-the-job training and external trainer inputs: the first ten teacher development videos were produced with an external supplier, then production transitioned to working with RIES media (October 2019) and then the e-learning team (August 2020). RIES staff learnt how to select topics, how to write a brief, how to write a script, production and coordination steps, filming and editing techniques, review a video, sign language dubbing, mainstreaming GEDSI in media, child protection.
- Capacities of DTE staff to plan and implement a national in-service teacher training program for the new curriculum and promote a more pedagogically sound approach for teacher support and mentoring. This has resulted in DTE taking the lead in the development of a new strategy for teacher CPD which incorporates many of the BEQUAL activities, concept and approaches and paves the way for a national teacher CPD system.
- Increased confidence, commitment and ownership of master and provincial trainers (MT and PT) to understand what CPD looks like and why it is important.
- Increased autonomy and ownership of target DESBs staff to planning and implementing in-semester teacher support by using models and training provided by BEQUAL.

Another key aspect of the BEQUAL approach relates to its work across multiple geographic and governance levels: central, provincial and district levels. Given the education sector context in Lao PDR, such approach is both necessary and challenging. As noted above, there is lack of collaboration and coordination within (horizontally) and between (vertically) these levels that affect all areas of education service delivery. This is compounded by MoES centralised ‘top-down’ culture and high staff turnover in certain areas. In addition, the lack of clarity about departmental roles and overlapping responsibilities at central MoES is amplified at subnational levels where smaller teams work fluidly across different roles (PESS and DESB staff frequently move between departments and levels, and have variable motivation and experience in different task areas).

Acknowledging the complexities of these issues (well beyond the program scope), the EPR consultations have highlighted BEQUAL efforts to consistently provide a bridge between the different geographic levels (e.g. promoting clarity around respective responsibilities between DTE, PESS and TTC in the new the teacher CPD system) and to promote decentralised thinking in a centralised culture (e.g. involving subnational stakeholders to participate in curriculum writing and teacher training activities). As reported by the BEQUAL implementation team²⁰, this has required a flexible engagement strategy, with effective - and sometimes informal - communication protocols. Examples of such strategies have included:

- Systematically translating national reform in operational terms by supporting implementation in target districts to demonstrate feasibility and contextual adaptation.
- Basing BEQUAL implementation teams in provinces to facilitate dialogue and provide direct support to sub-national level agencies, and encouraging informal contacts and communication between these teams and targeted PESS and DESB. These national staff members have reportedly been key to developing and maintaining relationships, even after two regional offices had to be closed in 2020 due to programmatic budget pressure.
- Enhancing communication through use of informal platforms/channels such as WhatsApp groups for sharing and disseminating consistent messages. This approach has filled gaps where MoES communications mechanisms are suboptimal, however its informal nature does not guarantee prompt action nor stimulate responses until information is formalised.

The MTR noted that 'BEQUAL is perceived by some stakeholders to be predominantly oriented towards national activities, which is considered in conflict with the local/classroom-focused intent of the program design' and suggested that 'going forward, BEQUAL should aim to decentralise the bulk of programmatic support, including most TA, to the provincial and district level in targeted provinces' (p. v). The EPR team has found that, BEQUAL Phase 1 has sought to balance engagement at central and sub-national levels and has achieved commendable results at both levels. Although it has arguably focused much of its work on the central level by virtue of the national reform it supported, it has continuously worked through these multiple levels (i.e. centrally with MoES departments, at provincial level with PESS and TTC, and at district level with DESB), and encouraged clarity and effective communications at and between each level.

Overall, BEQUAL Phase 1 has operated flexibly, responding to emerging needs and interests when they arose. It has delivered services on behalf of MoES, particularly in the area of curriculum development and roll out, converted opportunities to develop stakeholders' capacities, and set out strong foundations for the 'long road' for system capacity development. It is apparent that going forward more emphasis should be put on capacity development and that a long-term perspective is required to address this issue. Similarly, the vertical gaps and horizontal dysfunctionalities will continue to provide challenges to the development and implementation of national reforms (such as teacher CPD system), and more attention needs to be directed towards understanding and addressing these challenges, wherever possible.

BEQUAL governance

The governance mechanisms of BEQUAL have evolved over time, with a net transition after the MTR. The initial setup included an annual steering committee, co-chaired at Minister and Head of Mission (HOM) level; though in practice it met for the first time in February 2017. After the MTR a new governance mechanism structure was put in place and has continued until now. It includes two levels:

²⁰ See BEQUAL End of Five Years Report (2020), p.20

1. Annual Steering Committees, co-chaired by MoES Minister and DFAT HOM, to endorse workplans and budgets, and discuss changes in strategic program directions; and
2. Quarterly Technical Committees, co-chaired by DoP Director General (DG) and DFAT First Secretary, to share and discuss program implementation progress and issues. These provide an effective platform for PESS, DESBs and TTCs to engage with RIES, DTE and DoP.

In addition, regular formal and informal meetings between DFAT, the implementation team and DGs of RIES and DTE have aided operational and methodological decision-making. Although the official program counterpart, DoP DG mainly plays a coordination role.

Both mechanisms are deemed complimentary and have facilitated the resolution of issues related to BEQUAL implementation. They are reportedly less effective in providing a platform for policy dialogue. The COVID-19 pandemic has constrained the organisation of governance meetings: only two quarterly Technical Meetings were held in 2021, with a limited agenda due to the online format.

BEQUAL management

The program management team and systems have evolved over time, with great improvement since the 2017 MTR, to convincingly adapt to the plans and functional requirements of the program. The structure of BEQUAL's implementation team, contracted and managed by Coffey/Tetra Tech International Development, was streamlined in 2018 to integrate different programming streams and decentralise subnational activities. This change, together with a new leadership team, has been instrumental in promoting internal reforms, gaining greater diversity in the team, and improving strategic and operational communication with DFAT. Regular formal and informal discussions have ensured consistent involvement of DFAT in program planning, budgeting and decision making and enabled joint and proactive assessment and management of risks. Both parties are reportedly satisfied on that front. The internal planning process within BEQUAL also seem effective, although some EPR respondents have argued it could be more inclusive with MoES. Similarly, several MoES respondents expressed a desire for increased transparency and access to BEQUAL finance details. This may indicate a degree of dissatisfaction with the Managing Contractor model that may affect GoL ownership – a position previously stated by MoES.

To oversee and manage the performance of BEQUAL Phase 1, DFAT has accessed other resources and mechanisms. A part-time Education Policy Advisor position was created after the MTR to primarily support the DFAT education team with its responsibilities of co-chair of the ESWG. Although funded under BEQUAL, this position has progressively transitioned out of program implementation to focus solely on the ESWG. DFAT has also benefited from strategic planning and performance assessment support from the Laos Australia Development Facility (LADLF), until June 2021. In addition, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and LADLF have designed and implemented a longitudinal evaluation of BEQUAL investment in teacher development²¹. Both ACER and LADLF have effectively supported DFAT to understand and manage the performance of BEQUAL Phase 1, however they have contributed less directly to supporting policy dialogue with GoL.

²¹ The midline evaluation report has been produced early 2022, and the final report will be submitted in late 2022. The evaluation results are eagerly anticipated as it will be the only assessment of student learning outcomes and assessment of teacher practices carried out at scale that compares the situation in BEQUAL target districts before and after the introduction of the new curriculum. The next anticipated study of similar size is the ASLO planned for BEQUAL Phase 2. For both studies it will be difficult to determine the impact of the new curriculum given that all grades have had their studies disrupted by COVID-19 since the Grade 1 curriculum was first introduced.

4. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

BEQUAL MEL system

The first year of BEQUAL Phase 1 was characterized by the late mobilisation of MEL resources and the lack of a clear MEL plan. Since then, several iterations of the BEQUAL MEL Plan have been developed, i.e.:

- The BEQUAL Monitoring and Evaluation Plan May 2015 - August 2018, submitted in January 2016;
- The BEQUAL Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan Sep 2018 - August 2020, submitted in October 2018; and
- The BEQUAL Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan Sep 2020 - Jun 2022, submitted in April 2021.

The MTR noted that until 2017, the MEL function had evidently been challenging, notably due to the lack of clarity about the purpose of BEQUAL MEL but also the under-resourcing of the function. It also noted that BEQUAL had several assets to support learning and adaptation, including considerable contractual flexibility to adapt and respond to opportunities and lessons, and access to LADLF services that provided a rare opportunity for learning. Shortly after the MTR, a second MEL Plan in 2018 was developed that reflected substantial changes in the program logic and a new MEL Manager was mobilised. The third updated plan came in with the contract extension, to cover the last 22 months of BEQUAL Phase 1 and the changes thereby agreed. These two last plans have undoubtedly improved the BEQUAL MEL function. They have included clear results frameworks and standardised MEL tools and approaches, so that results can be compared over time and across activities. They have promoted a more decentralised and integrated approach across the implementation team, involving the whole team in data collection, review and reflection on key findings. They have encouraged integration of MEL data in BEQUAL communications products and activities (e.g. media releases) and in presentations and discussions of governance meetings, particularly the quarterly technical committees. Other strengths of the current BEQUAL MEL approach include:

- Strong focus on monitoring and reporting on BEQUAL activities and outputs.
- Strong data collection processes, including increased use of technology that enable real-time data collection,
- Increased emphasis on GEDSI in data collection (e.g. data disaggregation by sex, ethnic language groups and disability status).
- Greater alignment with MoES' MEL needs, priorities, capacities and systems, especially in relation to ESSDP implementation monitoring (e.g. integration into MoES LESMIS platform), and effective collaboration with MoES, PESS and DESB staff involved in data collection, analysis and reporting.

Comments from key respondents have highlighted a number of areas of improvement for the BEQUAL MEL approach. These include:

- Some confusion remains between the MEL objectives, methods and tools, and between the monitoring, evaluation and learning functions in the MEL plan. The latest plans focus well on the monitoring function and data collection processes, and less on the evaluation and learning functions. It suggests key evaluation questions (which are overarching performance questions) but offer limited guidance on how these are answered.

- The evidence generated on the achievement of program EOPO level, albeit growing, is still limited .²²
- The limited emphasis on producing and utilising program performance information for strategic policy dialogue and discussions.

Support to MoES MEL

The lack of relevant, timely and accurate information about the education sector remains a challenge for MoES decision makers. BEQUAL MEL efforts have convincingly provided evidence to support formal adoption of BEQUAL-supported materials and processes (e.g. adoption of teacher training cascading model). In addition, BEQUAL Phase 1 has supported and strengthened MoES MEL processes in many ways, including:

- Joint monitoring activities with MoES departments that included the development of tools for shared data collection and reporting and basic MEL capacity development activities.
- Facilitating capacity building and training activities across the MoES M&E network, which currently uses a BEQUAL-designed KoBo-based system.
- Supporting DoI and DoP in 2021 to develop a new approach to monitoring ESSDP implementation, including a new template for three-year subsector workplans with relevant indicators and targets. The new template represents a major shift in thinking on the part of DoP towards greater understanding of the value of performance monitoring.²³
- Supporting DoI M&E Division to finalise their own five-year work plan using a similar template with clear indicators and targets.
- Supporting DTE to develop an implementation monitoring approach for their activities within the Teacher Education subsector plan

5. Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

Strategy and activities

The BEQUAL Phase 1 Gender Equality and Inclusive Education (G&IE) Strategy has evolved over time. There have been two iterations of the Strategy:

- The first G&IE Strategy was produced in November 2018 and covered the period January 2018 to August 2020.
- The second G&IE Strategy was produced in May 2021 and covered the period September 2020 to June 2022.

²² This is partly due to the confusion around the responsibilities to assess BEQUAL EOPO. LADLF has produced analysis and evaluation studies across the BEQUAL program logic and ACER is implementing an evaluation that covers the scope of BEQUAL EOPO. This situation has created confusion around the responsibilities of the program implementation team to assess BEQUAL EOPO achievements.

²³ Previously, MoES departments prepared 3–5-year workplans but did not include indicators or targets that could measure progress or achievements during implementation.

BEQUAL Phase 1 has demonstrated a commitment to gender equality and inclusive education from its inception. To substantiate the initial goal of “more boys and girls of primary school-age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, achieve functional literacy and numeracy and acquire life skills”, the program design defined disadvantaged children as girls, children from ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities, and those at the intersection of these dimensions.

Initially the focus of GEDSI, like the rest of the program, was broad. The program’s geographic targeting focused on communities with high populations of ethnic minorities as the most disadvantaged communities. A number of program activities included a strong GEDSI dimension, such as the Ethnic Teacher Scholarship Program (ETSP) and the BEQUAL NGO Consortium (BNC) that developed activities in local communities with some focus on disability and inclusive education. Engagement with the Inclusive Education Centre (IEC – now renamed IEPC) was challenging due to limited capacity and leadership.

After the 2017 MTR, the first program G&IE Strategy articulated a twin track approach, with track one focused on mainstreaming gender equality and inclusion into the curriculum, pre-service teacher education, and in-service teacher training, and track two including more intensive support in target districts, such as ETSP, as well as developing targeted support that could apply nationwide, such as SLP. The second strategy covering the 2020-22 extension focused the objectives to raising awareness among MoES officials; incorporating contextually progressive representation of G&IE in learning materials; trialling innovations; G&IE related advice; and internally modelling best practice. Those two strategies have structured BEQUAL GEDSI efforts in a multi-layered approach, with direct work with MoES and subnational administrations, as well as broader public awareness raising through public diplomacy events and communications campaigns.

In terms of results, the program has reportedly contributed significantly to promote G&IE within MoES and at subnational levels. Although challenging to measure, the mainstreaming of GEDSI strategy into curriculum development has laid important foundations for a cultural change throughout society at large, as the new GEDSI-infused textbooks will be used for a generation at least. Girls and ethnic children in Lao PDR can ‘see themselves’ in the curriculum, and representation supports their participation in education. In addition, BEQUAL has reportedly identified ways to catalyse changes in MoES thinking and behaviour through incentives and celebration of achievements. The list of direct achievements includes:

- The upskilling of RIES curriculum development and technical staff who reported using new GEDSI skills in other projects, such as dubbing in sign language and ensuring gender equal representation.
- The upskilling of BNC participating agencies who reported substantial learning around GEDSI prioritisation and responsive approaches through engagement in BEQUAL, and integration of these lessons in all their work post-BEQUAL participation.
- The improved language skills of non-Lao speaking children who participate in the Spoken Lao Pilot (SLP) and who can then better engage in learning. The project has focused on areas with high populations of ethnic minorities.
- Stronger integration of GEDSI in video products: sign language dubbing, disability themes for role models docuseries, progressive scenes with Learn Together (e.g. gender roles, representation of non-Lao speaking students)

Notwithstanding these achievements, the EPR consultations have highlighted some areas of limitation, including:

- Although GEDSI elements are incorporated in curriculum material, they have not yet shown signs of transforming attitudes and norms in schools: albeit improving, front-line teachers still have limited ability to incorporate such principles into their classroom. The BEQUAL GEDSI strategy recognises that changes will be gradual, and the support has focused more on outputs and stakeholders' capacity at central and subnational levels. The extent to which these stakeholders are receptive mediates the extent to which BEQUAL activities will produce impact at school level.
- The BEQUAL approach to GEDSI has recognised the need for a significant focus on ethnic minorities, with less focus on gender equality and disability inclusion. Addressing disability through the curriculum materials has been met with some resistance. The program, through the BNC, has funded some successful activities identifying and supporting children with disability in the communities and removing physical barriers, but it was recognised that expertise in this sector in Lao PDR is limited and that more resource and a longer-term approach is required (see below).
- The involvement of MoES Inclusive Education Centre (IEC) - a centre that holds responsibility for coordinating and promoting the G&IE agenda in Lao PDR and that is therefore the logical counterpart for BEQUAL GEDSI efforts – has been limited. The BEQUAL implementation team has strenuously tried to engage with IEC staff who were invited to multiple events throughout Phase 1, using different approaches, to lead on G&IE discussions. Although IEC representatives participated in some planning meetings, they did not take ownership and leadership of any event. The lack of IEC onus and participation in BEQUAL activities is mainly understood as a lack of capacity and leadership. Finding a way to support and engage effectively with the IEC, through for instance advocacy for effective leadership and being opportunistic in engagement with IEC while identifying other GEDSI allies within MOES, should be a BEQUAL prerogative going forward, to ensure a sustained approach to GEDSI.

Resources

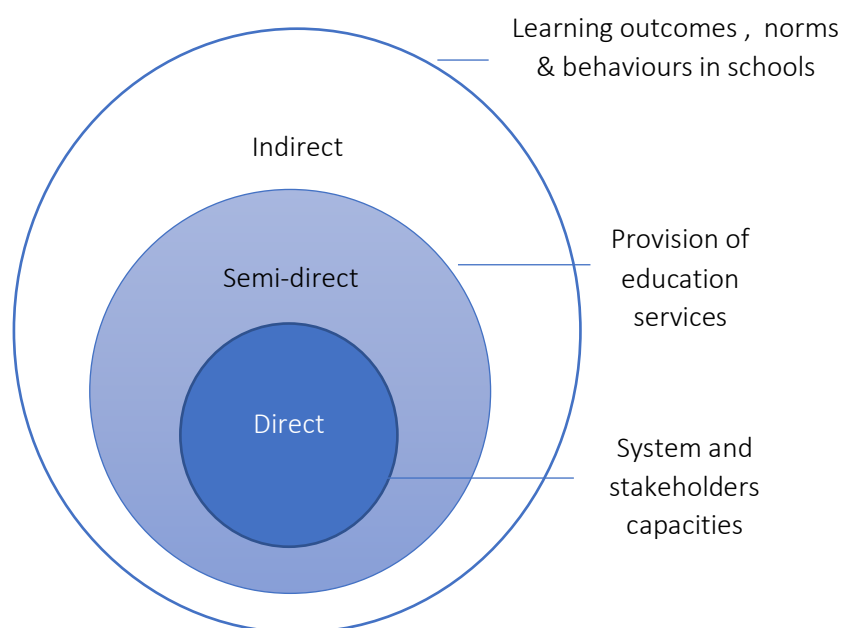
A critical point raised by the MTR was the adequacy of resources - particularly human resources - devoted to the GEDSI agenda. The BEQUAL design called for a full-time Education, Participation and Community Engagement Specialist. This role did not materialise before the MTR, and has been filled by a composite of international short-term consultants. Post-MTR, the program went through two recruitment rounds for a GEDSI specialist, but no suitable candidate was identified. Questions have been raised about the (too) high level of expectations for this position, i.e. a GEDSI specialist with a primary education development background. Regardless, it was left for another position (i.e. Deputy Team Leader) to play a GEDSI coordinating role. Although this strategy has encouraged the mainstreaming of the GEDSI agenda throughout the program, it has left the program without a dedicated full-time GEDSI specialist throughout Phase 1, a sub-optimal situation for a program of BEQUAL's dimension and scope. As already noted in the MTR, building consensus on equity and inclusion takes a clarity of purpose, an understanding of the added value, evidence to enable informed judgements, champions, and careful communications. In short, it deserves focus, energy and attention, best resourced for a program like BEQUAL by (at least) a full-time position in country, in addition to the skills and ownership of all other staff members.

Impact of GEDSI

As noted above, BEQUAL MEL efforts have attempted to be GEDSI responsive, identifying a G&IE results framework and disaggregating data. However, there remains an overall challenge with using the data to draw strategic messages and clarifying and measuring GEDSI impacts. If one is to consider the framework of impact illustrated in Figure 6 below, there appears a link between the nature of BEQUAL GEDSI impacts (direct, semi-direct or indirect) and the availability of evidence, as following:

- Direct GEDSI impacts often relate to processes and stakeholders' capacity, are noticeable over the short-term (as direct output), and include better understanding of GEDSI concepts and tools (e.g. G&IE assessment tool, capacity of to develop GEDSI responsive materials) and their integration into relevant processes (e.g. training participation, video and curriculum materials content, etc.). These impacts are generally well-informed, documented and understood.
- Semi-direct GEDSI impacts relate to the provision of education services, take effect over the medium-term and include the delivery of services outside direct control of the program (e.g. content development, teacher assessment and training, pedagogical advice). The basis of evidence for these impacts is less strong and often - but not always - relies on self-reporting methods.
- Indirect and long-term GEDSI impacts are changes in learning outcomes, behaviours and practices at school level (e.g. increased functional literacy of disadvantaged students or changes in prevailing norms in schools and communities). These changes are complex, take multiple years (if not a generation) to become observable, and require social and economic incentives beyond the education sector. That said, signs that these long-term changes are occurring can be identified and BEQUAL should be encouraged to identify them pre-emptively and track them, through a GEDSI strategy with clear objectives, evaluation questions, measurement tools, and indicators to support data collection. At this point, there is limited evidence of these impacts.

Fig. 6 - A framework for GEDSI impacts



6. Agility and adaptation

BEQUAL has proven to be a remarkably agile and adaptable program during Phase 1. In the face of important contextual disruptions such as substantial DFAT budget cuts and a COVID-19 pandemic, the program has adapted and changed in multiple ways while maintaining an overall focus on nationwide support for new curriculum introduction and teacher training, most notably at two critical junctures: the MTR in 2017 and the extension in 2020 that followed the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact of MTR

As noted above, following the MTR there have been a number of profound transformations in the BEQUAL program, resulting from a combination of responses to the MTR recommendations²⁴, the phasing out of activities, and the incremental impact of DFAT budget cuts. They included:

- A sharp re-focusing of the scope on 1) primary curriculum development and implementation for core subjects²⁵, including printing and nationwide distribution of textbooks, teacher guides and learner support materials, and 2) teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities²⁶.
- A retargeting of sub-national support on 32 disadvantaged districts²⁷ for DESB-to-school support for curriculum uptake, and the adoption of outputs-based grant model for target DESBs.
- A new HR structure for the BEQUAL implementation team and the mobilisation of new team members, including a new Team Leader and the establishment of three BEQUAL regional teams (BRT) to decentralise support to the subnational level.
- Strengthened communications processes with DFAT, and spacing out Steering Committee meetings from six-monthly to annually.
- A new strategic plan and a revised MEL Plan.
- A revised G&IE Strategy that strengthened GEDSI into programming, data collection and reporting.

These changes have driven the program towards a more focused and cohesive scope, a streamlined approach to implementation, and a stronger integration of national and sub-national activities. Discussions around the risks and rewards of these changes have included the following points:

- Focusing on a smaller number of core subjects has meant that non-core subjects are not produced and distributed by BEQUAL anymore, and the implementation of the curriculum is at risk of delay due to MoES' limited resources. For instance, the Grade 3 materials for non-supported subjects that were due in schools in September 2021 were still in production early 2022, with no clarity on when distribution will begin. Schools are therefore in the position of teaching Grade 3 using old and new curriculum materials that are structured around fundamentally different teaching timetables and pedagogical approaches for each subject.

²⁴ Agreed through the joint BEQUAL – DFAT management response.

²⁵ The initial focus was on development supporting all subjects of the national curriculum (grades 1 and 2), except mathematics. However, DFAT budget realities ultimately led to implementing the MTR recommendation of reducing curriculum development support from all subjects to core subjects (grades 3 onwards), including physical education (grade 3)

²⁶ CPD activities have revolved around providing resources nationally, and intensive support in target districts to enable principals, PAs and PTs to implement a variety of CPD approaches using the resources developed.

²⁷ 32 target districts were identified after the MTR and 2 more districts were added later on.

- Focusing on a smaller number of target districts has increased BEQUAL’s capacity to provide post-training school support to these locations. However, this has also created a dichotomy of development, between target and non-target districts. Ultimately the program concluded that the risk of a twin track education system was too great if essential support to curriculum reform was only provided to target locations. This, combined with the difficulty of selecting most disadvantaged Provinces in light of the MoES identification of a priority list of 40 districts, led to the provision of curriculum resources and teacher training activities nationwide to ensure foundational support. As such, the program still supports core subjects’ curriculum materials production and distribution and teacher training nationwide, while providing post-training support to 34 targeted districts.
- BEQUAL sub-national support in the form of outputs-based grants for DESBs to provide follow-up pedagogical support to schools in target districts is considered successful, both in terms of delivery model²⁸ and the resulting DESBs capacity to assess school support needs and differentiate responses. Given the output-based grant models relies on evidence, this approach has also led to increased monitoring and evaluation capacity at DESB level.
- The BRT strengthened relationships at subnational levels, improved communications between central and subnational levels, increased the timeliness, relevance, and accuracy of MEL information and built capacity of PESS and DESB across a range of school support topics. It was reduced in size and two offices were closed due to budget reductions, but it remains an essential link between BEQUAL and target districts.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated significant constraints and risks for the timely and effective delivery of BEQUAL Phase 1 activities and achievement of program outcomes in 2020 and 2021. Multiple Lockdowns over several months have affected the operational management and engagement of, and collaboration with, stakeholders, including MoES counterparts and PESS/TTC/DESB staff. Border closures delayed the production and transport of curriculum materials to and within Lao PDR. Travel restrictions and limits on group sizes constrained nationwide delivery of teacher training for the new Grades 2 and 3 curricula. School closures prevented or delayed data collection and monitoring visits. In BEQUAL target districts, many teachers struggled with online or remote teaching and received sub-optimal guidance from the ministry to cope.

Against this backdrop, BEQUAL has had to adapt in many ways. The EPR consultations have highlighted the resilience and flexibility with which the program has managed the difficulties presented by COVID-19 disruptions. Not only has the program continued to deliver its mandate and achieve milestones as planned, it also pivoted to support an MoES vaccination promotion campaign – an initiative appreciated by many respondents. New and innovative ways of working include:

- Developing remote and online solutions for quality assuring the production of the curriculum materials, including the provision of additional proofs and samples of the printed materials delivered via courier, photography and videos of production processes.
- Producing suitable online teaching materials and learning strategies, e.g. a suite of video learning materials, an online training for the Teacher Support Pack (TSP) writing team, and the launch of a Blended Learning Pilot (BLP) to develop the skills of Provincial Trainers (PTs) to participate in and facilitate online learning.

²⁸ When compared with the acquittal-based model of the predecessor District Operating Grant (DOG) scheme.

- Adapting STA inputs and meetings / workshops with MoES counterparts to online platforms, including for Quarterly Technical Committee meetings. While there are some negative aspects to online engagement, there have been positive results from this shift, including budget savings, time efficiencies, and accessing stakeholders that may not otherwise be able to participate (e.g. remotely located or unable to travel)
- Provision of new facilities to PESS & DESB offices for remote communication.

In addition, some previous program strategies paid off. For instance, the network of provincial and district-based trainers enabled teacher training activities to go ahead despite travel restrictions for Vientiane-based teams: knowledgeable trainer teams were available to be deployed to training locations or support with remote monitoring of training quality when Vientiane-based personnel from MoES or BEQUAL could not travel. In another instance, prior to COVID-19, BEQUAL had developed supplementary learning resources that were available electronically and online, via YouTube, on TV, and on USB memory sticks distributed to teachers with curriculum materials. The resources included teacher development videos, a clay-animation education program (Learn Together), and audio files that support the teaching of Lao language, music and English. Given their format, these resources have proven popular during the pandemic and were shared with other DPs in support of their COVID-19 response efforts.

In other cases, unforeseen benefits were accrued. For instance, travel restrictions led to greater involvement by PTs in monitoring and activity delivery, and enabled them to develop capacities and strengthening relationships with PESS and TTCs - both of which are key stakeholders in the teachers' CPD system. In the case of the Spoken Lao Pilot (SLP) initiative, the end line data collection planned for April 2020 had to be cancelled due to national lockdown, prompting a relaunch of SLP from the start of the following academic year. This meant that an extension of the SLP approach to Grade 2 was not possible, but it had the advantage of giving time for improving the teacher training resources and approach and meant that trainees were more experienced by the second year of implementing SLP classes.

III. Conclusions

1. Key messages

The key messages below synthesise the EPR findings, and offer an informed reflection on the BEQUAL Phase 1 achievements. They have been debated within the EPR team, and discussed with the DFAT Education Team at Post.

1. A flexible and adaptive program

BEQUAL is Australia's flagship aid program in Lao PDR. Despite its size and complexity, BEQUAL Phase 1 has displayed a remarkable capacity to change and adapt to its context, while sharpening its performance over time. As detailed throughout the findings section, the program has demonstrated its adaptive management capacity most acutely after the MTR, and again following onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes and adaptations have been internal (e.g. restructuring the team and management processes) and external (e.g. reframing the objectives pursued and activities delivered). In fact, the adaptive management approach of Phase 1 has enabled BEQUAL to respond flexibly and strategically to major changes in context and priorities while maintaining the quality and relevance of support to MoES. It has positioned Australia as a flexible, pragmatic and capable GoL development partner and operator in the education sector of Lao PDR; a position acknowledged by many - if not all - stakeholders consulted.

2. Relevant in the Lao PDR context

Throughout the period of Phase 1 implementation (2015-2022), BEQUAL support has remained relevant to the needs of the education sector and the priorities of the Government of Lao PDR, despite changes in relevant GoL strategies and GoA funding levels. The original design was, in the words of many, too broad and too ambitious. GoL's new primary curriculum reform agenda provided an opportunity for the program to re-focus its scope and objectives. This refocusing effort firmed up BEQUAL's identity around teaching quality – a broad agenda that is as relevant as challenging in the context of Lao PDR. Serving an ambitious agenda, the Phase 1 approach - although service delivery oriented - has enabled the development of strong relationships with stakeholders and nuanced understanding of the education landscape in Lao PDR, across the multiple levels of education governance (i.e. central, provincial, district and community). In addition to core activities, initiatives such as the Spoken Lao Pilot and the Teacher Development Evaluation should offer robust evidence to demonstrate the value and relevance of BEQUAL effort in target districts. As such, the multiple Australian investments in the Lao education system offers a strong platform of engagement and achievements, upon which further support can build.

3. Substantial achievements

The achievements of BEQUAL Phase 1 are substantial and recognised as such by stakeholders. The new Lao PDR national primary curricula for core subjects are modern, infused with gender equality and international pedagogical principles, and its implementation (Grades 1-4) is on track – a feat largely due to BEQUAL support. A new teacher training system that follows a decentralised cascading model has been implemented successfully, has demonstrated agility and value during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has been accepted by MoES. A cohort of ethnic teachers has been trained so they can teach non-Lao children in remote districts, once they receive a teaching position. Substantial in-service training activities have been provided to teachers centrally and at sub-national level, and TTC and DTE have increased capacity to develop and deliver teacher training activities. Targeted PESS and districts have improved processes and increased capacity to plan, budget and deliver support services to

primary schools. There have been many challenges to program implementation, whether related to limited capacity of stakeholders, cuts in program funding, or disruptions posed by the COVID-19. Some of them have slowed down or impeded the delivery of planned program activities, others have forced difficult decisions, such as to discontinue activities. However, at an aggregated level, BEQUAL achievements have been commendable and appreciated: they have demonstrated Australia's ability to support a large and complex education reform agenda and have established a foundation for the development and consolidation of a teacher CPD system in Lao PDR, beyond the needs of the current primary curriculum reform.

4. A strong focus on gender equality and inclusive education, less on disability inclusion

BEQUAL has adopted a twin-track GEDSI approach, with mainstreaming and targeted interventions, as described in the successive program G&IE strategies. In line with the rest of the program, the mainstreaming approach has focused on strengthening the GEDSI responsiveness of systems, tools and processes that guide teaching quality in Lao PDR. Substantial inclusion-oriented activities - such as the ETSP and SLP - have targeted children in disadvantaged communities. In addition, BEQUAL geographic targeting speaks directly to the concepts of disadvantage and inclusion. The twin-track approach has evolved from strength-to-strength, effectively supporting the inclusive education agenda within MoES and raising foundational awareness on issues of disadvantage and exclusion at all levels of the education system. Although the evidence of impact on behaviours and practices in classrooms is growing but still limited, the program has been effective at developing outputs (systems, tools and processes) and strengthening individual and organisational capacities. Of particular notice, the integration of GEDSI concepts and approaches into the primary curriculum has been successfully facilitated through technical support and training. As summarised during the EPR discussions, the 'inclusive education revolution' has begun in Lao PDR and BEQUAL Phase 1 has been a fierce advocate and supporter. The program has focused more on gender equality and ethnicity and less on disability inclusion – a topic that still attracts resistance and stigma in Lao PDR. Grants provided to INGO through the BNC to implement GEDSI responsive activities at community level have been impactful - not just for the beneficiary communities but for the NGO themselves who have reported increased focus and capacities to integrating GEDSI in their (post BEQUAL) programming. This shows that although the evidence of transformational impact in classrooms is limited, the impacts can be subtle and unexpected, and a mid- to long-term perspective is needed to accurately assess BEQUAL GEDSI efforts.

5. A MEL function focused on operational performance

The MEL function of BEQUAL Phase 1 has evolved and improved over time; a common trend in DFAT-funded program of this size and complexity. Notably, the integration between BEQUAL MEL efforts and MoES MEL processes has been strong, and BEQUAL has effectively supported the development and strengthening of MoES MEL processes. While this is positive and should continue, it is also important to distinguish BEQUAL MEL from MoES MEL systems: both have different objectives and purpose, not to be conflated.

The EPR notes that the current performance information generated by BEQUAL MEL reportedly meets management needs for program implementation. However, the system and processes presented in the successive MEL plans deserve more clarity and strategic focus. The current plan is focused on monitoring of activity outputs and data collection, and the information generated serves well the purpose of tracking the operational performance of the program. It is less evident how outcomes evaluation and analysis are used to inform program strategic performance, both in terms of results and directions, and policy dialogue with MoES.

6. A growing basis of evidence of impact

Put simply, the end goal of BEQUAL is to improve the learning outcomes of children, particularly those living with a disadvantage. The evidence of BEQUAL impact on stakeholders capacities and process improvement is strong. These achievements have established strong foundations for transformative changes at the classroom level (i.e. teacher performance and student learning outcomes). However, the evidence of these changes is still limited. This is due partly to the program's approach (i.e. modernising national systems and developing stakeholders capacities along the way) which requires time for impact to trickle down and be observable, the challenges of collecting and analysing information on the impacts on children, and the profound disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic that have affected the program when it was best placed to yield (and understand) results. As mentioned above, tackling the question of impact requires a longer-term perspective as well as investment in resource-intensive analytical studies. Although heavily influenced by the COVID-19 induced learning gaps, the results of the DFAT-funded longitudinal Teacher Development Evaluation (due late 2022) will partially fill the gap and contribute to a better understanding of the impact of BEQUAL Phase 1 support.

7. Ongoing efforts and mixed collaboration results with like-minded partners

With a total budget of AUD 80 million over seven years, BEQUAL Phase 1 is a sizeable investment in which multiple partners have invested: besides Australia who has provided the majority of funds, USAID and the EU have contributed financially (respectively USD 1.8 million and EUR 11.5 million) to the program. The program size and achievements have given weight and legitimacy to Australia to lead the group of DPs involved in the Lao PDR education sector. In addition to the BEQUAL Phase 1 funders, this group includes a number of partners such as UNICEF, JICA, The World Bank, WFP and international NGOs (e.g. Save the Children, World Vision, Care International, Plan International, Child Fund, and Room-to-Read). All these partners have the same objective: improving the quality of education services and student learning outcomes in Lao PDR. These Development Partners do meet and exchange information but often the cooperation stays at that level. They do not seem to plan and implement respective investments together, in a complementary and compounding manner. While DFAT and the BEQUAL implementation team have reportedly continued to reach out to other DPs and promote a culture of collaboration, it not always been reciprocated. Notably, the EPR consultations have demonstrated the complementarity of approach between INGOs and BEQUAL activities, and the desire and readiness for collaboration. It has also made apparent other DPs' limited understanding of BEQUAL approach, and as such the opportunities for improving the coordination and collaboration among like-minded DPs.

8. Mitigated influence on GoL policy agenda

Although the achievements of BEQUAL Phase 1 are known and appreciated, their political dividends, in terms of policy dialogue and influence, is less clear. As described in many analyses²⁹, some major roadblocks of the education system are due to policy failures, including the chronic underfunding of subnational service delivery or the opaque and disjointed budget and planning processes between district, provincial and national levels. BEQUAL support has undoubtedly been constrained by these systemic bottlenecks. Against this backdrop, BEQUAL has managed to secure some regulatory wins through demonstrating the effectiveness of new approaches, e.g. the new approach to teaching non Lao speaking children adopted by MoES (SLP) and the new national CPD system concept approved by the National Education Conference. The extent to which DFAT, through its BEQUAL support, has been

²⁹ See LADLF Review of the Primary Education Sub-sector in Lao PDR (2019)

able to influence changes at policy level outside programmatic and implementation issues is less clear. As noted in the findings, the official program counterpart unit is MoES DoP. While DFAT and the program implementation team have established an open and effective relationship with its Director General and colleagues from other departments (e.g. DTE and RIES), there have been limited strategic and policy dialogue discussions outside the program implementation scope. The BEQUAL Steering Committee meetings have not taken place regularly and are too structured to provide an effective forum for policy dialogue. The DP Education Sector Working Group serves the purpose of information sharing, less of contested policy debate and frank dialogue.

2. Key lessons

The second phase of the BEQUAL program, BEQUAL Phase 2, will cover the period July 2022 to June 2026, with a possible four-year extension until June 2030. It will continue the substantial progress and build on the achievements of the first phase, assisting MoES to complete the 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. Based on the EPR findings and key messages, strategic lessons from BEQUAL Phase 1 are presented below, together with concrete suggestions to consider for Phase 2.

1. Working with GOL

BEQUAL Phase 2 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. This requires DFAT and the BEQUAL implementation team to establish and strengthen relationships with key MoES officials and engage them into strategic/policy dialogue, with a view to: foster GoL ownership and leadership of BEQUAL-supported reforms; identify key approaches to these reforms; and improve vertical and horizontal coordination between MoES departments and stakeholders at sub-national levels.

To operationalise this approach, suggestions for the BEQUAL Phase 2 are:

- (a) Leverage effective and targeted communication of BEQUAL achievements to seek and convert opportunities to develop relationships with senior GoL/MoES officials (Minister and DGs) around and beyond BEQUAL activities and events.
- (b) Appoint a senior national staff member as part of the BEQUAL implementation team, to act as liaison coordinator with key MoES/GoL senior officials. The position should be well acquainted with the political economy and inner workings of MoES, and have experience with DP-funded programs.
- (c) Communicate early and clearly on BEQUAL budget structure and align Phase 2 activity budget to key MoES priority areas. Be clear on the rationale behind the choice of a managing contractor model for implementation, re-emphasising DFAT standards around risk management and accountability.
- (d) Develop a list of key policy dialogue priorities (see policy dialogue matrix in BEQUAL Phase 2 IDD), including key messages summarising clearly Australia's position and identify relevant supporters/champions within MoES/GoL. This list should be utilised to support formal and informal discussion with senior MoES officials and be updated periodically as necessary.

- (e) Integrate capacity development as a foundational principle of all Phase 2 activities, including the GEDSI and MEL strategies, encourage MoES staff to undertake the work currently being done by BEQUAL advisers, and ensure program annual plans and progress reports focus on capacities developed.

2. Teacher CPD System

Based on the Phase 1 experience with teacher training for the new primary curriculum, BEQUAL Phase 2 will support MoES to develop and implement a more comprehensive CPD system for teachers. As reported in the BEQUAL Annual Report 2021, the current CPD system design concept envisages new roles for TTCs and PESS and relies in part on integration with the new Fundamental Quality Standards (FQS) school self-assessment and development planning process. Since the plans for the CPD system are still evolving and DTE is engaging with multiple DPs (particularly the World Bank and UNICEF) on overlapping activities, it will be important for all partners to work transparently and collaboratively to ensure coherent policy development and efficient use of DPs funding.

Suggestions for BEQUAL phase 2 support to the teacher CPD system are:

- (a) Encourage MoES to include clear roles and responsibilities in the CPD system design, and map out implications for teacher recruitment and retention. Secure appropriate levels of vertical and horizontal consultation to foster clarity and ownership, particularly with TTCs and PESS officials who will play a crucial role in the implementation and monitoring of subnational activities.
- (b) Increase TTCs capacity to provide extensive and ongoing support to teachers via periodic workshops and school visits to monitor and support teachers in the workplace.
- (c) Involve school principals in teacher training given their role in supporting and monitoring teacher classroom practices.
- (d) Develop specific teachers guidelines/training for formative and summative assessments, and the use of rubrics.
- (e) Provide guidelines and specific training for teaching multigrade classes, which are widespread in remote areas and estimated at 27% of classes nationwide.³⁰
- (f) Promote transparency, alignment and collaboration with all DPs involved in supporting the development and implementation of the teachers CPD system (see below).

3. Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

The BEQUAL Phase 2 goal is “More boys and girls of primary-school age, particularly those with disadvantage, improve learning outcomes”. As more children can ‘see themselves’ in education through the revised curriculum materials, the program will now actively develop and support teaching practices that promote gender equality, disability and social inclusion. This should be informed by appropriate GEDSI assessment and a clear, pragmatic and well-resourced GEDSI strategy.

³⁰ BEQUAL Phase 2 Investment Design Documents (DFAT 2021)

Suggestions for the Phase 2 GEDSI efforts are:

- (a) Beyond the focus on disadvantaged communities (apparent in the goal), be explicit about the centrality of inclusion and equality concepts in the program strategic intent: better educated children will lead to more informed communities and a more inclusive and equitable society.
- (b) Carry out GEDSI situational analysis in target areas to analyse and understand factors of inequality and exclusion and the intersection between them (e.g. ethnic girls dropping out of school, different level of participation/learning for girls and boys with disabilities). Identify barriers for male and female teachers to commit to GEDSI principles in their practices.
- (c) Leverage on the Phase 1 success to normalise a GESI approach to incorporating the “D” in GEDSI – taking advantage of general acceptance around gender equality and utilising GoL gender equality mandates and GESI progress to promote a stronger intersectional lens and secure a space for discussion and integration of disability inclusion.
- (d) Clarify BEQUAL sought-after GEDSI impacts at the outset and define practical and actionable strategies to achieve them, identifying key entry points and positive deviance cases (if possible). This should include improving the GEDSI-responsiveness of teaching practices, not just capacities of teachers. Promote interventions for gender equality, disability inclusion and inclusion of ethnic minorities, with the recognition that some of these may require specialised approaches. In particular, develop strategies to address the issue of the girl’s drop-out rate since the advent of COVID-19.
- (e) Continue to request and facilitate engagement with GoL organisations involved in inclusive education, such as the IEPC, in the planning and implementation of BEQUAL-funded activities. Support the development of MoES GEDSI capacities – and in particular IEPC capacities and leadership - while distinguishing these efforts from mainstreaming GEDSI in program implementation.

4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

As stated in the design document, BEQUAL Phase 2 will develop a more policy-oriented and ‘systems thinking’ approach. This will require leveraging 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. The Phase 2 MEL system needs to be designed, operated and utilised as a strategic management tool, providing performance information beyond operational accountability and covering contextual evolutions, lessons around replication and scalability, and ultimately results in classrooms.

Suggestions for the Phase 2 MEL function are:

- (a) Develop a utilisation-focused MEL plan (with fit-for-purpose MEL products), that distinguishes three separate and complementary monitoring, evaluation and learning functions, with clear details about their objectives and methods – including data collection, analysis and reporting tools.
- (b) Focus the collection, analysis and reporting of performance information on higher level results (outcomes) such as teacher practices and student learning.
- (c) Strengthen linkages with MoES MEL processes by aligning the BEQUAL Results Framework indicators with DoI-defined ESSDP indicators.

- (d) Distinguish efforts to support the MoES MEL system from the implementation of the Phase 2 MEL system, and continue to build capacities at subnational-levels to collect monitoring data and report on results.
- (e) Raise awareness on the results of the ACER-led Teacher Development Evaluation study (see midline and endline reports), and integrate lessons into the programming of Phase 2.

5. Working with other development partners


Recognising that factors influencing learning outcomes are multiple and benefit from a multi-pronged approach, DFAT will continue throughout BEQUAL Phase 2 to develop and nurture collaborative relationships with other DPs working in the education sector. Through its role as co-chair of the ESWG, DFAT will also play a leadership role in policy dialogue with GoL on challenging reform issues, including education financing, equity and quality issues. Given the number (and overlap) of DP investments on teaching quality and the sub-optimal coordination provided by MoES, strong DFAT leadership will be necessary to build, formally and informally, a coalition of like-minded DPs working collaboratively and engaging jointly with GoL. More effort by development partners is needed to harmonise and coordinate programs and work plans at technical levels. This can be led by DFAT, but it requires commitment from all DPs involved in the ESWG.

Suggestions for engaging effectively with other education DPs and supporting a synergistic and collaborative environment for respective investments are:

- (a) Encourage systematic information sharing, harmonisation and coordination of programs and work plans at technical levels, and continue to engage in strategic discussions with all DPs. Institute regular multilateral meetings with like-minded and interested DPs (including INGOs), and maintain informal discussions with individual partners.
- (b) Understand and accept the different levels of DPs' interest to work collaboratively. Clearly, not all partners are willing and/or capable to interact at the same level, and this means a differential speed approach to collaboration might be necessary. Work more intensively with those interested and encourage those less interested to join the collaborative effort. Figure 7 below provides a simple framework to frame and/or plan the depth of collaborative efforts.
- (c) Re-energise and resource the ESWG mechanism to ensure 1) effective coordination and synergies of DPs' investments, and 2) robust and results-oriented policy discussions with GoL - away from polite protocol-driven interactions. As a support mechanism for DPs' collective impact, the ESWG requires clear purpose around a common agenda, open and effective communication mechanisms, effective measurement and reporting systems, and mutually-reinforcing activities³¹. The ESWG scope of service could potentially covers the following functions: overseeing strategic directions (vision and strategy); supporting aligned activities; establishing shared measurement practices (M&E); building public and political will (facilitating outreach and communication); advocating for policy reforms; and mobilising funding.

³¹ The EPR team is aware that a paper outlining the potential for the development of a Program-Based Approach/ Joint-Financing Arrangement for the Lao PDR education sector has been produced for the benefit of DFAT. Such undertaking will likely take time to develop and, if MoES is interested, BEQUAL Phase 2 could support necessary framing and dialogue between MoES and DPs.

Fig. 7 – Ways of working together

Levels	Integration	Description
1. Communicate	 <p>Less</p> <p>More</p>	Organisations share information together
2. Cooperate		Organisations operate asides and consult as needed, often through informal interactions, on separate activities and/or discrete processes
3. Coordinate		Organisations implement mutually reinforcing activities and systematically adjust and align work with each other for greater outcomes
4. Collaborate		Organisations implement together activities based on a shared outcomes and goals, with agreed decision-making and common measurement processes, and dedicated resources

Annex 1 – EPR Terms of Reference

END OF PROGRAM REVIEW

BASIC EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCESS IN LAO PDR (BEQUAL) PROGRAM PHASE 1, 2015-2022

1. Background

As articulated in the Australian Foreign Policy White Paper, Australia’s regional interests lie in a stable, prosperous and resilient Southeast Asian region. Recognising that education is not only a basic human right but also vital to the economic development of Lao PDR, Australia supports the development of an educated workforce to enable Lao PDR to take advantage of regional economic integration. Australia has invested in the Lao PDR primary education sector over the past 20 years. During that period, as Lao PDR overcame the challenge of education access, the focus of Australian support gradually shifted from access to improving the quality of education. In parallel, as we gained knowledge, expertise and relationships in the sector, our investments shifted from a multilateral (through UNICEF, WFP and WB) to a bilateral delivery model. These shifts have placed us in a unique position as a trusted partner in the sector, to leverage our experience to support challenging reforms aiming for a better quality of education in Lao PDR.

Basic education is an important foundation for Lao PDR’ stability and prosperity and a central pillar of DFAT’s COVID-19 Development Response Plan (CDRP) in Lao PDR. As noted in the plan, COVID-19 has increased disparities in basic education quality and access in Lao PDR, where measures of learning achievement of primary school students remain persistently and critically low. Improving primary school learning outcomes is essential as a basis for the development of a skilled workforce, and also for broader social well-being – both of which are key contributors to the achievement of Lao PDR national economic and social development objectives. A stronger basic education system that provides quality education for children will help Lao PDR develop a more skilled and productive workforce, better equipped to resist shocks, escape poverty and contribute to a stable society. Quality education is also critical to women and girls’ empowerment and improved social equality.

As the centrepiece of Australia’s support to basic education in Lao PDR, the Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR (BEQUAL) program Phase 1 was designed in 2013 and represented a shift in Australia’s approach, to providing stronger engagement with the Government of Lao PDR (GoL). Commanding a budget of around AUD 80M³² over the period 2015-2022, the BEQUAL Phase 1 focuses on supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports’ (MoES) with a major reform of the primary school curriculum. It also provides targeted support for the most educationally disadvantaged districts in Lao PDR, with a particular focus on ethnic children, girls and children with disability.

³² The Phase 1 budget includes contributions from the European Union and USAID.

BEQUAL objectives have evolved throughout Phase 1. The Phase 1 program logic was last revised in September 2020, at the start of the second Phase 1 extension, to reflect the reduced scope of program activities and a more focused approach to achieving core outcomes within the final 22 months of Phase 1. The current logic model is structured around the following elements (see Annex 1):

- The revised program goal **“More girls and boys of primary-school age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, achieve functional literacy”** reaffirms BEQUAL’s continued support to children experiencing disadvantage. In the context of Lao PDR, functional literacy means progressive development of the literacy skills required to achieve the minimum standard level expected at grades three, four and five in reading and writing Lao language.
- The End of Program Outcomes (EOPO) are **‘better teaching and learning resources’** and **‘more effective teaching’**.
- Intermediate outcomes (IOs) underpinning the two EOPOs have been agreed with MoES to realistically reflect manageable and achievable tasks, based on the available financial resources and personnel capacity of both BEQUAL and the key MoES departments the program directly supports.

The second phase, BEQUAL Phase 2 (July 2022 – June 2026, with a possible four year extension to June 2030), has been designed and is currently out for tender. Phase 2 will continue the substantial progress and build on the achievements of the first phase, assisting 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 direct service delivery to a system reform approach that aims to strengthen government ownership and 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 engagement with districts, to facilitate the scaling-up of successful approaches through ‘knowledge to policy to practice’ processes.

As the end of BEQUAL Phase 1 is approaching (June 2022), an End of Program Review (EPR) is required to evaluate the program effectiveness and quality. It is suggested the EPR be carried out by an independent team. The Review will document the evolution of the program’s objectives, assess their achievements and more broadly investigate the extent to which the program has contributed to Australia’s relationship with Lao PDR. It will also synthesise lessons learned from BEQUAL Phase 1 to feed into the implementation of BEQUAL Phase 2.

2. Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the EPR is to:

3. Assess BEQUAL Phase 1 achievements against the program’s objectives, and
4. Reflect on these achievements and draw strategic lessons to feed into the implementation of the BEQUAL Phase 2 (2022-2023), including to strengthen the MEL and GEDSI program strategies.

The review’s primary audience is the Australian Embassy in Vientiane, DFAT more broadly, the Australian public, MoES, and BEQUAL Phase 1 beneficiaries, including schools, communities, teachers and students. The main users of the review findings will be the Australian Embassy in

Vientiane (Education Section), MoES and the implementation team of BEQUAL phase 2. Given the breadth of the audience and users, the review should consider a wide range of perspectives from program partners including Government of Lao PDR (GoL) stakeholders. Again, noting the document will be publicly available, sensitivities of audiences such as the Australian and Lao Governments should be taken into consideration.

3. Scope

The Review should answer the following key evaluation questions (KEQ) (see figure 1).

Fig. 1 – Key Evaluation Questions

Criteria	KEQ
Relevance	8. How and why have BEQUAL 1 objectives evolved?
Effectiveness	9. To what extent and how has BEQUAL 1 achieved its objectives?
Efficiency	10. To what extent and how has BEQUAL 1 (governance, management, delivery approach and resourcing arrangements) made appropriate use of Australia’s and Laotian partners’ time and resources?
MEL	11. How and how well has BEQUAL 1 assessed, learnt from, and improved its performance?
GEDSI	12. How and how well has BEQUAL 1 implementation integrated and achieved results on gender equality, disability and social inclusion?
Agility and adaptation	13. How and how well has BEQUAL 1 pivoted to respond to the MTR findings and the COVID-19 pandemic?
Lessons Learned	14. What are the key lessons from BEQUAL 1 implementation to feed into Phase 2 and beyond?

Based on an initial briefing and some documents review, the Review team will unpack these questions, possibly develop sub-questions, and suggest an analytical framework to guide their answer.

4. Activities

The Review team will develop a Review Plan that will describe the methodology to answer the KQ. This methodology will include the following activities:

1. Desk Preparation
 - Briefing session with Vientiane Embassy

- Document review
- Prepare EPR Plan, including analytical framework and consultation plan

2. Data collection and analysis

- Consultations in Lao PDR (Vientiane and provinces) and Australia
- Analytical workshop: Synthesis of key findings
- Preparation and presentation of an aide memoire

3. Report Drafting

- Draft Review report
- Reception of feedback
- Finalisation of Review report

As part of the data collection and analysis phase, it is expected the following sources of information be consulted (most if not all consultations will be conducted remotely due to travel restrictions):

- Relevant Literature: background documents including National Education Strategy, program documents (annual plans and reports) and external evaluations and analysis (see Annex 2 for a list of recommended reading materials)
- Consultations with stakeholders in Lao PDR: BEQUAL implementation team, DFAT education team, and key GoL partners (Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Education and Sports), provincial and district authorities (TBC), other donors and development partners working in basic education sub-sector (e.g. World Bank, EU, USAID UNICEF, WFP, JICA and NGOs).
- Consultations with DFAT stakeholders in Australia: Education thematic group, Lao PDR desk, Gender Equality Branch, Effectiveness and Risk Management section.

5. Deliverables

The Review team is expected to produce and submit the following deliverables:

Fig. 2 – Deliverables

#	Deliverables	Timing
1	A Review Plan	Before the consultations starts, no longer than 4 weeks after Review start
2	An Aide Memoire (max 10 pages) with preliminary findings	At the end of the analytical workshop, to be presented to Post and key stakeholders
3	A draft Review report ³³	Within three weeks of presentation of the Aide Memoire
4	A final Review report (max 20 pages excl. annexes)	Within 10 working days of receipt of DFAT comments on the draft report

³³ The Report is required to meet DFAT Aid Program Monitoring and Review Standards ([Independent Review Reports - Standard 6](#))

6. Team and Inputs

To ensure the findings are objective, the Review will be conducted by a team of independent consultants who have reputable experience of the Lao PDR context. The Team will be responsible for the technical quality of the Review and the preparation and writing of all deliverables including the Review Plan and Draft and Final Reports.

The suggested team includes a Review Leader, a Laos Education Specialist and an Inclusive Education Specialist. Together the team members will demonstrate sufficient expertise in program strategy, M&E, education sector in Lao PDR, and DFAT systems and processes.

The table below summarises key responsibilities for each position and Annex 2 details the professional requirements for each team member.

Fig. 3 – Team

Position	Responsibilities
Review Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lead and manage the Review team and process, including overseeing the inputs of other team members; ▪ Develop the review plan including the overall approach and review methodology; ▪ Lead and attend meetings with key interlocutors; ▪ Develop and present an aide memoire, with input and assistance from team members as required; ▪ Produce a draft and final report in accordance with the agreed Review Plan; and ▪ Ensure overall quality of deliverables and appropriate of communication with DFAT.
Laos Education Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide inputs into the development of the Review Plan, including the overall approach and review methodology; ▪ Attend key meetings and/or lead consultations with stakeholders in Lao PDR; ▪ Contribute to the analytical workshop and the development and presentation of the aide memoire to stakeholders and DFAT; and ▪ Contribute to producing a draft and final report in accordance with the agreed Review Plan
Inclusive Education Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide inputs into the development of the Review Plan, including GEDSI analysis in the overall approach and review methodology; ▪ Attend key meetings and/or lead consultations with stakeholders in Lao PDR; ▪ Contribute to the analytical workshop and the development and presentation of the aide memoire to stakeholders and DFAT; and ▪ Contribute to producing a draft and final report in accordance with the agreed Review Plan, including analysis of the GEDSI strategy, and specific GEDSI lessons learnt and recommendations for BEQUAL phase II

The table below provides an indication of the level of effort required for each position.

Fig. 4 – Level of effort

Activity	Review Leader	Laos Education Specialist	Inclusive Education Specialist
1. Desk preparation	Up to 10 days	Up to 5 days	Up to 5 days
2. Data collection and analysis	Up to 15 days	Up to 15 days	Up to 15 days
3. Draft and Final Reporting	Up to 20 days	Up to 5 days	Up to 5 days
4. Additional work if required	Up to 5 days	Up to 5 days	Up to 5 days
Total	Up to 50 days	Up to 30 days	Up to 30 days

7. Timeline

The Review will start in November 2021 and be finalised at the latest by March 2022. The table below indicates the timing of activities.

Fig. 5 –Timeline

Activities	2021			2022	
	November	December	January	February	March
Team Mobilisation					
Mobilisation					
Briefing					

Desk Preparation																													
Document review																													
Review plan																													
Data collection and analysis																													
Consultations																													
Analysis and Aide memoire																													
Report drafting																													
Draft of Review report																													
Feedback																													
Finalisation of Review report																													
Publication																													
Drafting of management response and publication of final report & management response	Within three months of report finalisation																												

8. Budget

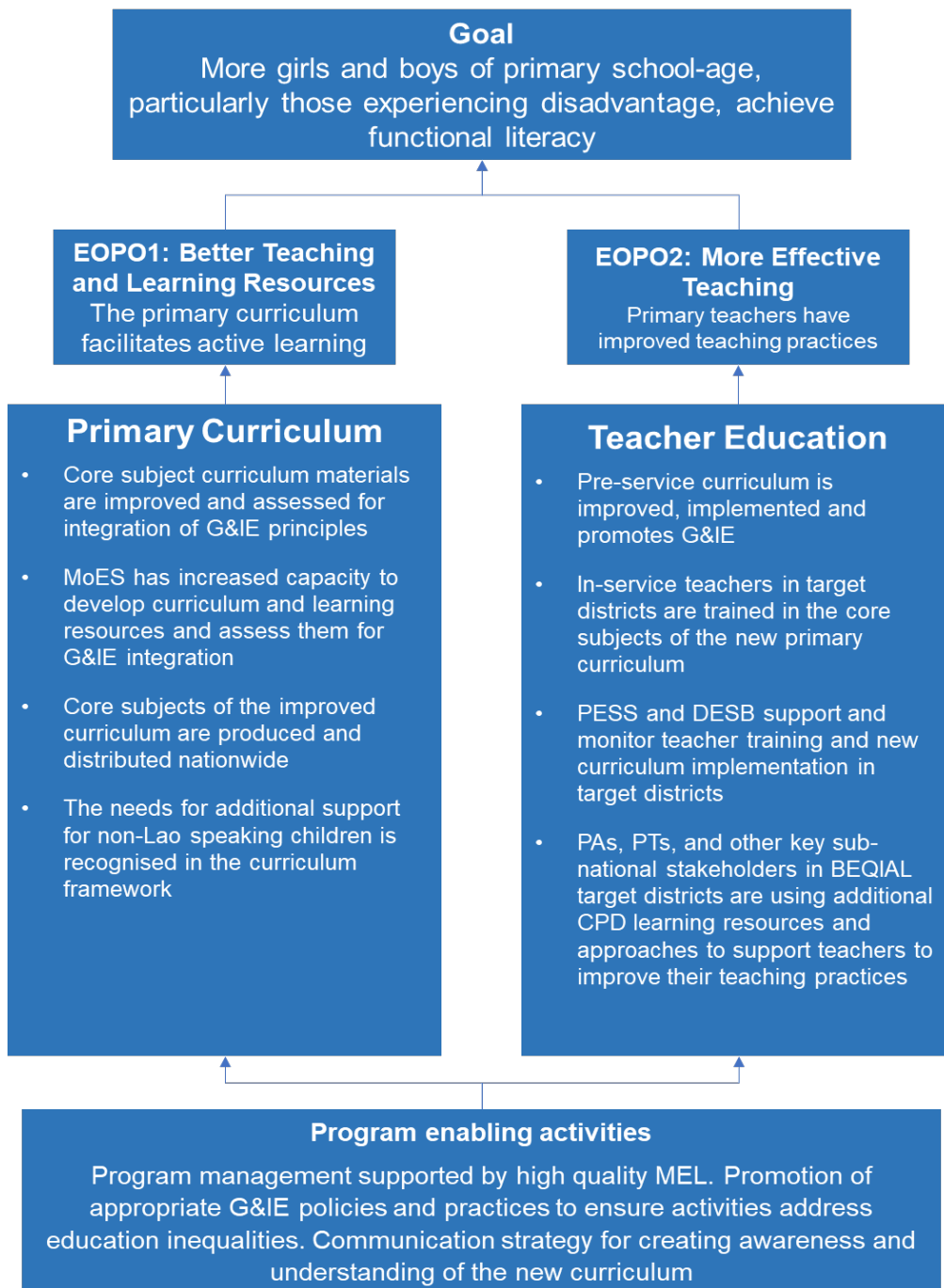
The total estimated budget for the EPR is up to AUD 140,000.

9. Ethical Considerations

In conducting this review, the EPR team should:

- Comply with:
 - DFAT Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance Note and
 - DFAT Aid Evaluation Policies.
- Obtain informed consent in writing from review participants after they have been advised of what information will be sought and how the information will be recorded and used.
- Treat all information and findings as confidential.
- Reference appropriately all published or unpublished documents used in the review.

Annex 2 - Revised BEQUAL Phase 1 Program Logic (2020)



Annex 3 - Enquiry and Analytic Framework

Domains of Enquiry	Lines of Enquiry
KEQ #1 - How and why have BEQUAL 1 objectives evolved?	
Changes in overall context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How has the overall BEQUAL context changed since the completion of the MTR in 2017? o How have <u>GoL</u> priorities and constraints changed since program inception in 2015 until the present? o How have contextual changes impacted women, girls, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities? o How have DFAT priorities and constraints changed since program inception in 2015 until the present?
Changes in BEQUAL objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How has the 2017 MTR affected BEQUAL objectives? o How has the advent of COVID affected BEQUAL objectives in 2020-2021? o How have changes in the Lao context affected BEQUAL objectives?
KEQ #2 – To what extent and how has BEQUAL 1 achieved its objectives?	
Sequence of macro-achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What significant macro achievements under BEQUAL Phase 1 objectives have taken place during these time periods? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) From program inception until MTR (2) Post MTR until the arrival of COVID-19 (3) Final phase, August 2020 – June 2022 o What was planned but not achieved, specifically relating to ESSDP objectives? o Why were these objectives not achieved?
Primary Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How well have the stated objectives in the area of primary curriculum reform been achieved during Phase 1 implementation? o What is the status of new primary curriculum development at the end of 2021? o What circumstances have affected the timely achievement of curriculum development targets in recent years?
Teacher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How well have the stated objectives in the area of teacher education been achieved during Phase 1 implementation? o How well have the stated objectives in the area of teacher management and support been achieved during Phase 1 implementation? o What is the status of the teacher professional development system at the end of 2021? o What circumstances have affected the achievement of teachers' education targets in recent years?

Annex 4 - Key stakeholders consulted (in chronological order)

No.	Name	Organisation	Position	Gender
1	Anna Dyason	DFAT	First Secretary	F
2	Sounisa Sundara	DFAT	Program Manager (Education)	F
3	Bounmy Souvannalath	DFAT	Senior Program Officer (Education) / Disability Focal Point	F
4	Phonethida Vongsay	DFAT	Senior Program Officer (Education)	F
5	Kaykhoun Khounvisith	DFAT	Program Manager (Education)	F
6	Davone Bounpheng	DFAT	Program Manager (Education)	F
7	Paul Kelly	DFAT	Head of Mission	M
8	Dan Heldon	DFAT	Deputy Head of Mission	M
9	<u>Bounpanh Xaymounry</u>	<u>DoP, MoES</u>	General Director	M
10	<u>Onekeo Nouannavong</u>	<u>RIES, MoES</u>	Director	M
11	<u>Sengngeune Wayyakone</u>	<u>RIES, MoES</u>	Head Curriculum Development Centre	F
12	<u>Phonesiri Outhaivan</u>	<u>RIES, MoES</u>	Curriculum Writer	F
13	<u>Manoly Dongvan</u>	<u>RIES, MoES</u>	Curriculum Writer	F
14	<u>Oudom Singdala</u>	<u>RIES Media Team, MoES</u>	Deputy Director of Media Team	M
15	<u>Sakdavong Xaiyalath</u>	<u>RIES Media Team, MoES</u>	Deputy Head of Television Division	M
16	<u>Oudalone Sylavong</u>	<u>DGE, MoES</u>	Deputy Director	M
17	<u>Phoutsavad Vongphachan</u>	<u>DoI, MoES</u>	Head of M&E Division	F
18	<u>Kouthong Sommala</u>	Department of International Cooperation, MPI	Director – Asia Pacific and Africa Division	M
19	<u>Phetsourin Norasing</u>	<u>DoF, MoES</u>	Deputy Head of Accounting Division	F
20	<u>Somphay Sengvilaysack</u>	<u>IFEAD, MoES</u>	Director of Teacher Development Centre	M
21	<u>Dara Khiemthammakhone</u>	<u>Inclusive Education Centre, MoES</u>	Director	F
22	<u>Seng Arloun Phothilath</u>	<u>SVK PESS</u>	Head of Teacher Education Section (Master Trainer)	M
23	<u>Bounpan Chanphengphan</u>	<u>Thapangthong DESB</u>	PA	M
24	<u>Phankham Silipanyo</u>	<u>Outhoumphone DESB</u>	Deputy Head of DESB	F
25	<u>Thongkham Phonthad</u>	<u>Phonthad Primary School, Outhoumphone District</u>	Teacher	F

26	<u>Amphailin Xayvammoungkhoun</u>	<u>Xayvammoungkhoun Primary School, Outhoumphone District</u>	Teacher	F
27	<u>Vanpheng Manyvongxay</u>	<u>Manyvongxay Primary School, Outhoumphone District</u>	Teacher	F
28	<u>Souksan Nuannavong</u>	SVK TTC	Assistant Head to TTC Office	M
29	<u>Nantaxay Inthasone</u>	KHM PESS	Head of PESS	M
30	<u>Oley Xayvasan</u>	<u>Mahaxay DESB</u>	PA/PT	M
31	<u>Samlouay Konsouvankham</u>	<u>Boualapha DESB</u>	PA/PT	M
32	<u>Longmixay Sonemany</u>	LNT PESS	Deputy Head of PESS	M
33	<u>Boualy Keomanyvong</u>	LNT PESS	Deputy Head of Teacher Development Section	F
34	<u>Somsay Vatthanathon</u>	Sing DESB	Head of DESB	M
35	<u>Khamphan Phongsavat</u>	Long DESB	Deputy Head of DESB	M
36	<u>Nuanchan Thippavong</u>	LNT TTC	Deputy Director	F
37	Sylvia Bitter	BEQUAL	Team Leader	F
38	Anne <u>Stasinowski</u>	BEQUAL	Planning, Production and Procurement Manager	F
39	Rebecca McHugh	BEQUAL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Manager	F
40	Soth <u>Phommalith</u>	BEQUAL	Primary Curriculum Implementation Manager	M
41	Suliyarn Viengkhamson	BEQUAL	Regional Programme Manager – Centre	M
42	Peta McLean	BEQUAL	Mgr. Teacher Education	F
43	Yasumasa Nagaoka	JICA	Education Policy Advisor	M
44	Akiko <u>Anakano</u>	JICA <u>ITEAM</u>	Chief of <u>ITEAM</u> Project	F
45	Sena Nukata	JICA	Representative Laos Office	F
46	Ezequiel Molina	World Bank	Task Team Leader of GPE II	M
47	Tara Beteille	World Bank	Task Team Leader of GPE II & III	F
48	<u>Bouakeo Sivilay</u>	World Bank	Education Consultant	F
49	<u>Vimala Deivongsa</u>	Plan International	Deputy Country Director	F
50	<u>Vilasack Viraphanh</u>	Plan International	Head of Education and Skill Program	M
51	Roslyn Gabriel	World Vision Laos	Country Director	F
52	Sharon Gorton	World Vision Laos	Education, ECD and Disability Specialist	F
53	Elisa Rosa <u>Buzi</u>	World Vision Laos	Advocacy and Resource Development Senior Manager	F

54	<u>Keoamphone Souvannaphoum</u>	Care International	Country Director	F
55	<u>Vilasai Thammavong</u>	<u>ChildFund</u>	Acting Country Director/Head of Programs	M
56	<u>Leklai Southavilay</u>	<u>ChildFund</u>	Former Education Manager	M
57	<u>Chansamone Bouakhamvongsa</u>	Room to Read	Senior Literacy Program Manager	F
58	<u>Eli Machanic</u>	Save the Children	Deputy Country Director	M
59	<u>Bouasvan Bouasy</u>	EU	<u>Attache</u> (Economic Governance)	M
60	<u>Francois Bernede</u>	EU	Consultant	M
61	Phetviengkhone Sayasane	USAID	Education Project Management Specialist	F
62	David Coleman	GPE in	Regional Education Advisor, Asia and the Pacific	M
63	Michael Lally	BEQUAL	Senior Education Advisor	M
64	Leotes Lugo Helin	UNICEF	Chief of Education	F
65	<u>Siamphone Buakhamvongsa</u>	UNICEF	Education Specialist	F
66	Clemency Oliphant	DFAT Vanuatu	Australian High Commissioner	F
67	<u>Vongduean Osay</u>	DTE	Deputy Director General	F
68	<u>Khet Phanlak</u>	DTE	Director General	M
69	<u>Chindavan Vongsaly</u>	World Bank	Health Specialist/Former EU Program Manager	F

Annex 5 - Key references

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