



Mid-term Review of the Education Sector Support Program in Solomon Islands

Final Report

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Table of contents

Executive summary	iv
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 The Program.....	1
1.3 The Review.....	5
2. Review Findings.....	10
2.1 Effectiveness	10
2.2 Sustainability	27
2.3 Efficiency	30
2.4 Relevance.....	40
2.5 GEDSI and Safeguarding.....	44
2.6 Learning.....	48
3. Recommendations	51



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Distribution note

The direct quotes in this report, while anonymised, have not been validated with the individuals who made them.

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About this report

This is the final report for the Evaluation Reference Group of the Solomon Islands Education Sector Support Program.

The information presented in this report is an amalgamation of the information gathered during the review, including:

- Review of key documents.
- Individual interviews.
- Group Interviews.
- Program financial data.

The report is divided into the following sections:

- [Section 1](#) provides the background to the Program and the Mid-Term Review.
- [Section 2](#) presents the review findings against each of the key questions.
- [Section 3](#) outlines the conclusions and recommendations.



Executive summary

The Solomon Islands education system has expanded and improved over the past decade leading to better outcomes in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and basic education. The Education Sector Support Program (the Program) was launched in 2020 in response to ongoing challenges in the education sector, including transition and completion rates, late age entry and infrastructure shortages. There is also a concern that teaching and leadership is not yet at a quality standard to sustain ongoing improvement of educational outcomes. There is still much to do in curriculum development and resources are often not reaching classrooms. Furthermore, system management requires ongoing strengthening to enable improved access and quality.

The Program is a partnership between the Solomon Islands Government, administered through the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Program focuses on achieving the following End of Program Outcomes (EPOO):

- Improvement in basic education participation (including correct age-for-grade participation) and completion rates
- Improvement in learning outcomes for children in basic education (particularly literacy and numeracy)
- Improvement in learning outcomes for disadvantaged children in basic education (including the very poor, those in remote areas and those with disabilities)
- Improved education sector management by Education Authorities (EAs), schools and MEHRD, in support of improved teaching and learning.

The Program provides funding through multiple complementary modalities, including:

- Earmarked Sector Budget Support (ESBS) to MEHRD to progress agreed priorities in its annual work program
- A Capacity Development Fund (CDF) to contract Technical Advisors (TA) to provide support in complementary priority areas
- A contestable NGO fund, which focuses on community projects regarding ECE, community engagement, and social inclusion
- Performance Linked Aid (PLA), which provides payments to MEHRD based on the achievement of jointly agreed targets
- Policy Dialogue, where DFAT and MFAT engage with MEHRD to support progress against key priority areas of the Program

A Program Management Team (PMT) administers and co-ordinates agreed activities on behalf of the implementing partners.



The Mid-Term Review

This Mid-term Review (the Review) aims to assess the overall performance of the Program towards achieving its outcomes, inform any changes to implementation in the Program and provide recommendations for a possible future phase beyond 2023.

Findings

Effectiveness

The Program's effectiveness, particularly the progress towards intermediate outcomes and end of program outcomes, has been difficult to evaluate due to the limited availability of data from MEHRD's systems from 2019/20 onwards. It is important to note that the lockdowns associated with COVID-19 and the civil unrest in 2021 constrained data capture activities over this period.

As this was a mid-term review, making evaluative judgments in relation to the Program's achievement of its End of Program Outcomes (EOPO) would have been unrealistic. Further, the Review found that the EOPOs were ambitious given the four year timeframe of the Program, and it is unlikely that the EOPOs were achievable within the life of the Program.

The Review has therefore focused on progress towards the Intermediate Outcomes (IO). There is evidence that the Program is on track to achieve three of the IOs and evidence of partial progress towards four of the IOs, albeit with some delays. There was insufficient evidence to assess progress against two of the IOs, and the review found risks to progress in achieving another two IOs.

The different Program modalities have generally been effective in supporting progress, each with its specific challenges. However, the PLA modality has not been as effective as anticipated. Effectiveness of each modality is presented below.

ESBS has been effective in terms of achieving results and meeting the needs of target populations with some notable progress in infrastructure development, curriculum development, and increasing teachers' capability. Feedback from interviews with teachers and students indicated overall satisfaction with Program support. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to improve the effectiveness of ESBS through increasing mechanisms for transparent and equitable school selection in infrastructure projects. This could include communication and involvement with beneficiary schools in the design process for infrastructure projects. There are also some concerns that traditional skills and values are not included in the curriculum and that professional development materials do not yet with the Education Legislative Framework (ELF) standards. At the Program level, there is a need to strengthen the planning of large projects (e.g. infrastructure, curriculum development) that are delivered through MEHRD, to limit the impact on its business-as-usual activities.

The CDF has increasingly moved to a "local first" approach to capacity development, with a shift to increased use of local Technical Advisors (TA) and use of the Yumi Fastaem planning tool. Local TAs can increase the effectiveness of support by leveraging local expertise and understanding, relationships and networks. The Program has also increasingly aligned TA with the delivery of ESBS activities, to ensure timely support in focus areas. There is some



evidence indicating the improvement of MEHRD staff capacity as a result, especially in areas such as finance, procurement, strategic planning, and teaching. However, the uneven distribution of TA resource across MEHRD departments and divisions, and limited resources to meet all capacity needs of schools, remain key challenges for the Program. The use of the planning tools under the Capacity Development Framework could help with prioritisation and justification of the focus of capacity building.

Non-government organisation (NGO) grants have been effective in strengthening parental involvement, provision of WASH facilities, capacity building during the COVID-19 response, integration of vernacular language in Early Childhood Education (ECE), and improvement of accessibility and inclusivity with a focus on children with disabilities. The modality has also helped to strengthen the relationship between MEHRD and NGOs. Increasing the ability of local NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) to participate in this modality could help to increase the sustainability of the support. Collaboration between NGOs and Education Authorities (EAs) could be enhanced, and the Program could support MEHRD to facilitate this process. Increasing NGO understanding of the ELF will also be critical going forward.

The PLA modality has not been achieving the purpose of incentivising MEHRD to achieve agreed benchmarks. While progress was made in some areas, there are several activities in MEHRD Annual Workplan that have not been carried out or have been delayed due to COVID-19 lockdowns. As a result, the release of PLA funding has been delayed.

The Policy Dialogue modality has been effective in addressing Program implementation issues, through regular governance engagements between the Program partners. Some MEHRD staff expressed a desire for more frequent Governance Committee meetings and that the effectiveness could be enhanced if the Program Management Team (PMT) played a more prominent role in strategic discussions and provided greater oversight of program priorities.

Overall, the partnership between the three development partners is grounded in the principles of development cooperation for effective development, as outlined in the National Development Strategy 2016–2035. The current partnership is effective and productive in enabling the progress of the Program, and MEHRD and MFAT co-chairing Education Development Partners Coordination Group (EDPCG) enhances the partnership. Increased coordination with other Solomon Islands Government (SIG) government agencies, Program partners, and development partners, could increase the effectiveness of the Program, particularly in cross-cutting areas such as Gender Equality, Disability, Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and safeguarding.

Sustainability

The Review found that the benefits and positive impacts from infrastructure projects, capacity development, and NGO Grant projects were likely to be sustainable. However, MEHRD's funding constraints and the limited capacity of MEHRD and Education Authorities may present barriers to the sustainability of the Program's achievements. Limited engagement of local NGOs and CSOs in the NGO Grant modality could also pose a challenge in sustaining positive impacts from the NGO Grant projects.

Furthermore, the Solomon Islands education system has been reliant on external consultants (i.e., international TA) to perform some functions. This may pose some risks for knowledge



retention and the sustainability of the work after they depart unless careful planning for knowledge transfer is undertaken. It should also be noted that there is currently no sustainability strategy in place to guide the implementing partners to consider sustainability in their work. The absence of an exit strategy or a sustainability plan in the final year of the Program increases the vulnerability of its achievements in the future.

Efficiency

Overall, the Review findings indicate that the funding modalities are mostly being used in an efficient manner. The model of partnership at the Program governance level, at the time of this Review, supported efficient delivery of the Program but could be strengthened with increased consultation with EAs, NGOs, and schools.

Efficiency across the Program is reliant on the modalities working in a complementary manner. While the budget support, capacity development, and NGO grants each display features of efficiency, it is their respective complementarity that ensures the investment overall is efficient.

The budget support, by investing in priorities articulated in MEHRD's annual plan, ensures that there is a clear focus and prioritisation of investment by SIG, and therefore an intent to deliver MEHRD's Annual Work Plan as efficiently as possible. The Program's gradual shift to achieving a balance between budget support and adviser support, with TA targeted at areas that directly support MEHRD's delivery of ESBS funding, is ensuring that its modalities are providing complementary support to achieve the intended outcomes.

The contestable NGO fund is identifying community-level investments that complement the overall investment with a focus on inclusion and equality, as well as some investment in ECE. Given the strengths of NGOs in community engagement, NGOs are likely the most efficient approach to working with communities on GEDSI issues, although further support to MEHRD to set a strategic direction for GEDSI in basic education may be beneficial to guide investments.

Given the complexity of the Program, and its adaptive aspirations, a PMT is necessary to coordinate delivery of activities and manage the monitoring and evaluation function necessary to support learning. The evidence shows that, despite an underspend of PMT operational funding in 2022, the PMT has supported Program efficiency. Efficiency could be enhanced through an increased focus by the PMT on supporting partners to be more proactive in managing risks and opportunities. Additional opportunities for improving efficiency could include supporting closer collaboration with other development partner governance bodies and gender equity programs, and an increased focus on mainstreaming GEDSI.

The Program funding model is complex, with DFAT reimbursing MEHRD based on actual expenditure on ESBS activities and MFAT providing advance funding. Given the already complex nature of the Program across its multiple modalities, the additional complexity of this arrangement increases the administration and budget management required of MEHRD. Increased alignment between DFAT and MFAT's funding model may increase efficiency, while longer term predictability of funding would help to promote both efficiency and sustainability of the Program by enabling longer-term planning.



The Review found that the spending in the PLA modality was often delayed. For instance, a report on progress towards agreed PLA indicators prepared by MEHRD with TA support, recommending a payment was submitted to MEHRD senior management in June 2022, but this had yet to be approved and therefore no payment had been made by Mar 2023. This indicates that the modality is not providing the right incentive structure for MEHRD to progress work in areas of agreed indicators or to approve a report required to trigger a payment. The review therefore does not find the PLA to be an efficient modality in its current form or governance environment.

Relevance

The overall Review findings suggest that the role and function of the Program remain relevant in the changing context and would remain relevant after the final year of funding for the Program. The Program was coherent with SIG and donor priorities. It has met the needs of the education sector in Solomon Islands through its support in access, teaching and learning quality, and education management. It aligns with global, regional, and national priorities in education by contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, supporting the Pacific's Regional Education Framework (PacREF), and the Solomon Islands National Education Action Plan (NEAP). It is also aligned with the development policy priorities of New Zealand and Australia in the education sector.

The Review found that the current program design is broad and complex, making it difficult to measure and demonstrate progress towards the IOs. While most of the intermediate outcomes are still relevant, some need to be revised or compartmentalised to align with the ELF. The Program could refocus on supporting MEHRD and other education sector entities to transition to their new responsibilities under the ELF. Mapping the current and future responsibilities of MEHRD and EAs would help to inform the future design and identify how best to partner with MEHRD as the primary Program partner and EAs as key stakeholders in education. Through this process, there is also an opportunity to confirm what other development partners are intending to focus on and confirm that the focus on basic education remains the most relevant scope of the Program.

GESDI and safeguarding

There are multiple barriers to inclusive education in Solomons Islands. These include:

- physical barriers (e.g. inaccessible roads, school buildings and facilities, and a shortage of specialised education schools)
- financial barriers (e.g. school fees)
- social barriers (e.g. stereotypes and stigma)
- human barriers (e.g. lack of knowledge and skills for GESDI inclusion, a shortage of teachers of specialised education, absence of data on disadvantaged students in MEHRD); and
- policy barriers (e.g. lack of policies, guidelines, tool, and alternate curriculums to accommodate diverse needs from children with various disabilities).



Nevertheless, the Program has made promising steps in addressing GEDSI and safeguarding issues in its planning and delivery of outputs and outcomes. Some achievements in this space include, for instance, integrating the concepts of social inclusion and indigenous pedagogy into the curriculum and professional development materials. Teachers were encouraged to use local languages in their teaching practices, which reflects the importance of place-based or locally based education. An inclusive education manual was incorporated into professional development training, equipping teachers with the ability to identify children with disabilities and refer them to specialised schools. Gender issues were given priority in infrastructure projects, capacity development, and NGO grants.

However, more work is needed, including increased technical advisory and capacity support to schools in terms of GEDSI, and consideration of climate change and other environmental risks in infrastructure projects. While the Program has not yet developed a strategic approach to GEDSI and safeguarding issues, it has developed the GEDSI tool. This tool is grounded in the relevant international and national policies around GEDSI and is sufficiently flexible to accommodate any other initiatives or requirements that may arise, especially in terms of administrative instructions from the ELF.

Learning

The Review found that the Program used an adaptive management approach that enabled it to acquire enough data to report on its performance and progress, despite the gaps in quantitative data. This approach relies on regular and transparent feedback loops to gather evidence for collective learning. The Program has also used a variety of tools and processes to collect evidence, including Stories of Change, the Risk Register, and PMT performance surveys. The Program used the learnings from its activities to inform annual planning to guide any adjustments to delivery. The Strategy Testing Workshop and Governance Committee meetings were identified as beneficial platforms for incorporating the learnings into planning, budgeting, and adjustments in delivery and spend.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the Review has identified recommendations for the future of the Program. Where possible, some of the recommendations can commence during the final months of this phase, noting that they would likely need to continue into a future phase. Other recommendations focus on considerations for the design of any future Program. These are presented below.

Recommendations that can, where possible, commence in the current phase

1. In preparation for passage of the Education Bill and implementation of the ELF, the Program should support MEHRD to undertake a sector and organisational review of current versus future accountabilities. This can commence in the final six months of the Program but will likely need to continue into any new Program.
2. The Program should increase its focus on GEDSI and safeguarding. In the final months of the Program, this could include providing specialist TA to support MEHRD to progress the implementation of the GEDSI tool and prepare for ELF implementation. In any future iterations of the Program, this could include support to MEHRD to strengthen engagement



- with other SIG agencies in this space (e.g. Ministry for Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology).
3. The Program should support MEHRD to develop more strategic approaches to school infrastructure data management and prioritisation that aligns with long-term SIEMIS plans. While this is likely to be long-term work, it should be prioritised so that better data can inform planning and decision-making.
 4. As MEHRD's role in policy formulation and system monitoring under the ELF requires increased sector co-ordination, including co-ordination within Solomon Islands education entities and with development partners, the Program should continue to support MEHRD and MFAT's role as EDPCG co-chairs. Provision of local TA to MEHRD's Strategic Services Division can help bolster the capacity of MEHRD in executing its development partner co-ordination functions.
 5. The Program should support MEHRD to develop a transparent and equitable process for selecting school-based infrastructure projects and examine environmental risks (related to geographic location) prior to authorising building. This should also include developing a process for confirming commitments to asset maintenance and local buy-in with schools and setting explicit expectations (e.g. through a Memorandum of Understanding).

Consideration for the design of any future Program

1. The design of any future Program should be aligned to the future accountabilities in the ELF. While MEHRD should remain the main Program partner, the design should consider how to support EAs and schools to meet their new accountabilities.
2. The design of any future Program should work with MEHRD and other development partners to confirm what other sector support is planned. If, through the design process, it is confirmed that UNICEF will continue to support ECE, the Program should maintain its primary focus on basic education.
3. The EOPOs of any future design should be calibrated to the length of the programme so their achievement is realistic within the timeframe of the Program. The changes in education system management that are embedded in the ELF are likely to lead to a period of transition for the Solomon Islands education system. Careful identification of EOPOs is therefore important to recognise the context and the opportunity to align the EOPOs with the ELF.
4. The Program should support MEHRD to develop its sector performance monitoring function under the ELF. This includes setting performance indicators, measures, and targets to assess the effectiveness of the ELF and any interventions that are delivered.
5. If a future design of the Program continues to include delivery of large projects (e.g. infrastructure), it should consider the best modalities for these investments. If the selected modality continues to be delivered through ESBS, the Program should consider funding specialist capacity in MEHRD or back-filling existing roles to ensure that core business as usual activity is not compromised. Increased support for coordination with the Ministry of Finance and Trade (MOFT) and the Ministry of Public Services should also be considered to ensure there are no delays in accessing funds through MOFT systems and SIG recruitment processes.



6. DFAT and MFAT should consider how they can streamline funding modalities to minimise the administrative burden on MEHRD's administration of funding. This could include a Delegated Funding Agreement to channel the funding through a single mechanism. A longer-term funding plan would also help to provide SIG and other Program partners with visibility for longer-term planning.
7. If NGO grant funding continues to be a modality for delivery of the Program, consideration should be given to the selection requirements to increase accessibility for local NGOs and CSOs. Directing the funding through SIG systems (e.g. through the ESBS), with appropriate TA support and PMT oversight, would increase ownership of the NGO grant by MEHRD and enable use of SIG due diligence requirements.



1. Introduction

This section provides the background of the Education Sector Support Program (the Program) and discusses its design and intended outcomes. Also outlined in this section are the scope and design of the Mid-Term Review (the Review), its methodology, and some key considerations.

1.1 Background

The Solomon Islands education system has expanded and improved over the past decade with strong demand for education at all levels. Although most primary aged children are enrolled and there is increasing access to Early Childhood Education (ECE), there are concerns with transition and completion rates, late age of entry into ECE (and subsequently primary school), and infrastructure shortages that are exacerbated by a rapidly growing school age population.

Despite improvements on standardised tests ([PILNA](#) and SISTA), which compare well regionally, teaching and leadership are not yet at a quality standard to sustain improving educational outcomes. There is still much to do in curriculum development and resources are often not reaching classrooms. Similarly, system management requires ongoing strengthening to enable improved access and quality.

The Solomon Islands education sector is currently undergoing a major reform in response to the challenges facing the system and the need to modernise it. The new Education Legislative Framework (ELF), including a new Education Bill and subordinate legislation, will decentralise some functions of Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), once passed, so that Education Authorities can effectively manage teachers and schools better (a responsibility they have had difficulties in fulfilling).

1.2 The Program

The Program, which runs from late 2019 through to the end of 2023, is a partnership between the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) – administered through MEHRD, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Program's goal is to improve the quality of basic education, which should be accessible to all children in Solomon Islands.

While the Program was designed to focus on supporting SIG to implement the National Education Action Plan 2016-2020 (NEAP), the Program's design also included flexibility to respond to emerging needs, new learnings, insights, and opportunities. As articulated in the Program Design Document, the End of Program Outcomes (EOPO) are:

1. Improvement in basic education participation (including correct age-for-grade participation) and completion rates through provision of priority infrastructure, more engaging and relevant learning, and support for NGOs to increase provision of community based ECE.

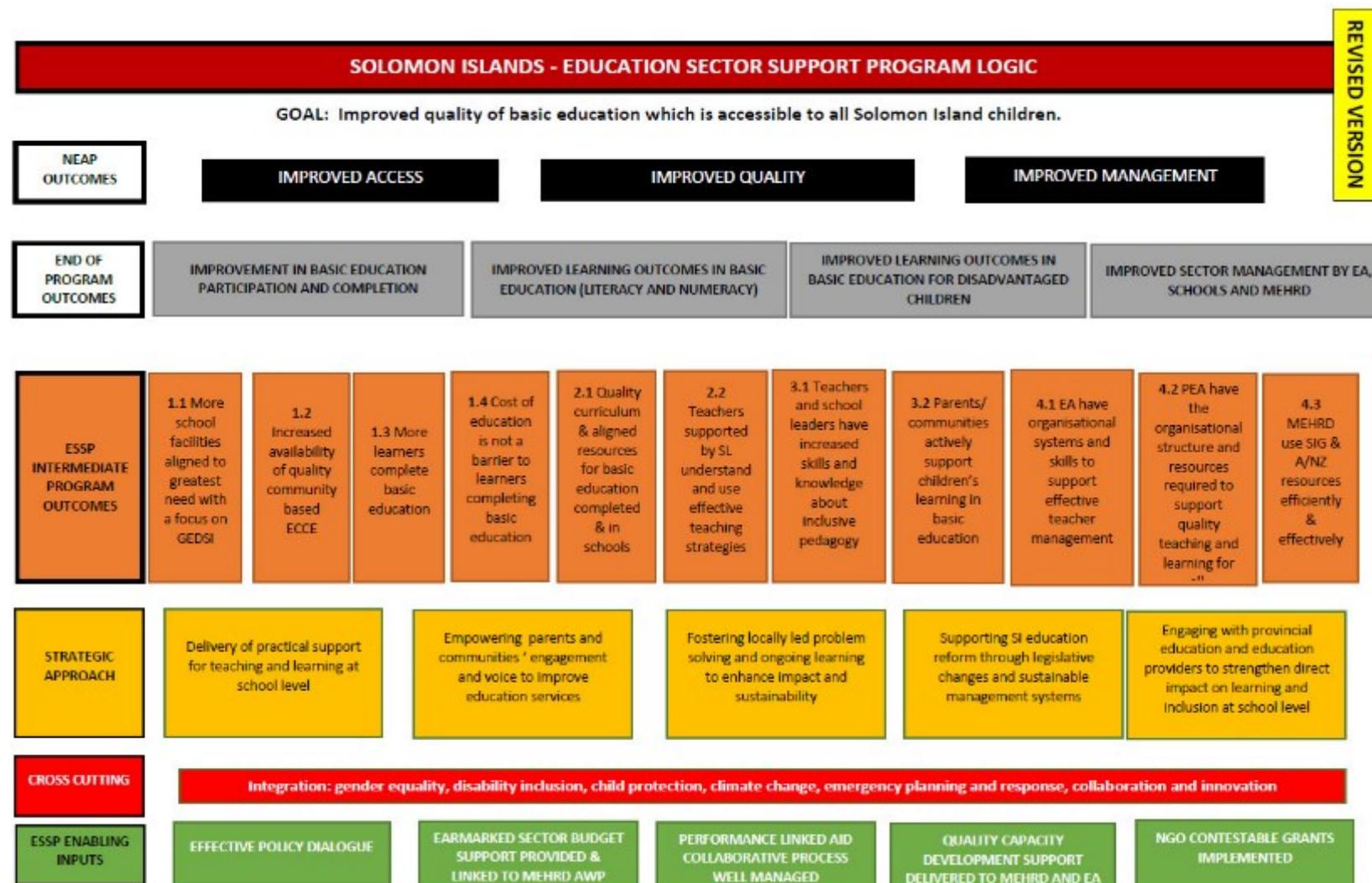


2. Improvement in learning outcomes for children in basic education (particularly literacy and numeracy) through completion of all outstanding core curriculum resources for basic education, efficiently distributed to schools.
3. Improvement in learning outcomes for disadvantaged children in basic education (including the very poor, those in remote areas and those with disabilities) through development of an inclusive curriculum and professional development for teachers and leaders, and increased funding of NGO programs to target causes of inequality, increase community engagement, and build demand for inclusive services.
4. Improved education sector management by Education Authorities, schools, and MEHRD, in support of improved teaching and learning through:
 - a. increasing MEHRD and Education Authorities' capability in teacher management,
 - b. increasing the capability of Education Authorities to support quality schooling and other prioritised support for MEHRD and Education Authorities.

While Gender Equality, Diversity, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) concerns were integrated throughout all the outcomes, the inclusion of an outcome focused on addressing the needs of disadvantaged children ensures a clear focus on those children and their communities. In June 2022, the program logic model was updated based on findings from the Program Management Team's (PMT) strategy testing workshop to reflect shifts in emphasis and lessons learned in implementation¹. This also aligned the Program closer to the direction of education reforms and MEHRD's new NEAP 2022-26. The revised program logic is shown in Figure 1, mapping the Intermediate Outcomes against the EOPOs.

¹ The program logic was further updated in March 2023 based on Strategy Testing workshops conducted in February 2023. However, as the Mid-Term Review data collection took place before the new program logic was agreed, the June 2022 version of the program logic is applicable to the review.

Figure 1: Program Logic Model



Source: Program MEL Framework & Plan 2021-23, p.7.
Note. ESSP = the Program



The Program is delivered through multiple complementary modalities with a total investment of AU\$64.32 million. This included AU\$22.32 million (NZ\$24 million) from MFAT and AU\$42 million from DFAT (subject to annual budget appropriations by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand). The indicative allocation of funding by modality, as per the Program design, is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Funding allocation by modality

Modality	Allocation (AUD)
Earmarked Sector Budget Support (ESBS): This modality provides substantial funding (around 80% of the DFAT and MFAT joint investment) for agreed activities within MEHRD's Annual Work Plan (AWP). It is intended to support activities which contribute to achieving MEHRD's NEAP outcomes and the aligned Program outcomes. The three main support components under this modality are infrastructure projects, the Curriculum Development and Professional Development project, and the Teacher in Training program.	\$40.83 million
Capacity Development Fund (CDF): This modality provides a flexible resource to source technical advisor expertise locally and internationally. Through these international and local technical advisors, it provides individual and organisational capacity development to MEHRD (e.g., mentoring, coaching, and training on the job).	\$9.0 million
NGO contestable fund: This modality aims to engage communities in supporting children's learning – including ECE - addressing the needs of disadvantaged children and building demand for improved services. There have been two rounds of support. Round 1 focused on the ECE (e.g., development of vernacular curriculum; delivery of home learning packages; and parental engagement). Round 2 focused on parental/community engagement, child protection and integration to disability and social inclusion.	\$3.5 million
Performance Linked Aid (PLA): This modality provides performance-based payments to MEHRD based on achievement of agreed targets.	\$6.24 million
Policy Dialogue: This modality is an important implementation arrangement where DFAT and MFAT can engage with MEHRD, including on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Solomon Islands Education Partners Coordination Group meetings. • MEHRD mid-year and annual joint reviews • Program Governance Committee meetings • Program/bilateral engagements. 	N/A

Source: The Education Sector Support Program Design Document

In addition, AU\$4.75 million is allocated for a Program Management Team (PMT) to undertake administration and coordination of Program activities.



1.3 The Review

DT Global, on behalf of the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) consisting of MEHRD, DFAT, and MFAT, engaged *Allen + Clarke* to undertake this mid-term Review of the Program. The purpose of the Review was to:

- assess overall program performance towards achieving program outcomes
- provide insights and recommendations to inform the final year of the Program's implementation
- generate recommendations to inform possible revisions to the design for the next phase of support beyond 2023, including identifying opportunities to improve sector coherence and for increased engagement.

The primary audience of the Review includes:

- the Program's Governance Committee to inform decision-making on program delivery
- MEHRD and the Australian and New Zealand High Commissions in Solomon Islands to inform ongoing management and inform decisions about the next phase of the program
- the MEHRD senior management team to inform education policy, systems and programs and thereby enhance outcomes in basic education
- the PMT to support effective management of the program and the transition to any future phases of support.

In addition, DFAT Canberra and MFAT Wellington have an interest in the Review to inform development programming more broadly in the Solomon Islands, and education programming across the Pacific.

The Review findings may:

- support the Program's implementation partners (including NGOs) to reinforce effective implementation and monitoring & evaluation;
- inform the Solomon Islands Education Development Partners Coordination Group in sharing lessons learned for possible application to other education programs in Solomon Islands; and
- enable the broader Pacific development community to take lessons for application across other programs in the region.

1.3.1 Scope and focus

The scope of the Review included all delivery modalities outlined in [Section 1.2](#) and the role of the PMT throughout the implementation of the Program. The focus was on answering six key questions (with 16 sub-questions as shown in Table 4), using the Program's MEL Framework & Plan (2021-23) as a guide. The Review focused on the [OECD-DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance](#), including effectiveness, sustainability, efficiency,



and relevance. Additional criteria on GEDSI, safeguarding, and learning were also included in the Review.

The key review questions (KRQs) were agreed with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), consisting of MEHRD, DFAT and MFAT representatives, during the Review's planning phase.² The KRQs are outlined against each of the Review Criteria below

Criterion 1: Effectiveness – To what extent is the Program on track towards achieving intermediate and end of program outcomes?

- KEQ 1.1 - What factors most supported progress towards outcomes and what were the most significant barriers?
- KEQ 1.2 - To what extent have there been unintended consequences (positive or negative) associated with the Program's implementation?
- KEQ 1.3 - To what extent are partnerships (with specified stakeholders) effective in enabling program outcomes?

Criterion 2: Sustainability - To what extent are changes likely to be sustained? Why/why not?

- KEQ 2.1 - What factors supported sustainable change and what were the most significant barriers?
- KEQ 2.2 - Are any initiatives established over the past 5, 10, or 20 years still active?
- KEQ 2.3 - How have any lessons learned been applied and how has this contributed to the sustainability of the initiative?

Criterion 3: Efficiency - To what extent are the program management team and respective program delivery modalities making efficient use of time and resources to achieve program outcomes?

- KEQ 3.1 - To what extent are resources being used in the most efficient way to provide value for money?
- KEQ 3.2 - What components/modalities of the program are creating the greatest impact and worth receiving more investment?
- KEQ 3.3 - Is the funding from the various streams efficiently coordinated and delivered on the ground to education entities

Criterion 4: Relevance - Considering the changes to the Solomon Islands and Pacific region context (political, economic, social, COVID 19), to what extent do the program logic and outcomes remain relevant and achievable?

- KEQ 4.1 - To what extent do the program logic and outcomes remain relevant and achievable in the context of education reform and financing gaps after COVID 19?

² For a full overview of the Review's phases, please refer to Appendix B.



- KEQ 4.2 - How coherent is the Program with Education Strategic Framework (ESF) 2022-2026, Australian and New Zealand policy priorities, and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacRef)?

Criterion 5: GEDSI & Safeguarding - To what extent are GEDSI and safeguarding issues of gender equality, disability and social inclusion, child protection, climate change, and disaster risks being adequately addressed in the program modalities (e.g., ESBS, capacity development, PLA)?

- KEQ 5.1 - How well is the current GEDSI and safeguarding approach aligned with the new Educational Legislative Framework?
- KEQ 5.2 - How have GEDSI and safeguard issues been considered and addressed in the planning and delivery of outputs/IPOs?
- KEQ 5.3 - To what extent do the interventions that address GEDSI and safeguarding issues meet the needs of the target program groups (e.g., girls and disadvantaged students)?

Criterion 6: Learning - How well does the Program measure, assess, and learn from its performance?

- KEQ 6.1 - How effective are the processes that are used for measuring and assessing program performance (i.e., MEL framework and tools, progress reports, strategy testing workshops, PLA reports)?
- KEQ 6.2 - How well are the learnings from these activities integrated into annual program planning, budget allocation, and adjustments?

In addition, five key focus areas were identified within some of the review criteria, which guided the focus of enquiry. These are:

- Effectiveness:
 - Has budget support been effective? What activities should be supported through budget support? What are the trade-offs of budget support in terms of MEHRD absorptive capacity?
 - Has capacity building been effective? What were the enablers and barriers?
- Relevance:
 - What is ESSP's role in supporting the Education Legislative Framework (ELF)? How should ESSP support the provinces with regards to decentralisation under the ELF?
 - Should ESSP support Early Childhood Education (given focus on basic education)?
- GEDSI and safeguarding:
 - What are the key barriers to inclusive education access, including in education management? How could ESSP have meaningful impact to improve education access?



1.3.2 Design and methods

The approach to the Review was guided by the phased approach signalled in the Terms of Reference (ToR),³ and the expectations of culturally responsive methodologies (Iromea & Reynolds 2021; Sanga, & Reynolds, 2023), including local expertise and capacity building.

A document review was undertaken based on information provided by DFAT, MFAT, and MEHRD. While the team was supplied with an initial set of 31 key documents⁴ specified in the ToR to understand the operational aspects of the Program, more documents were identified through the course of the Review. The final document review included more than 50 documents, (see **Attachment A** for the full list), including but not limited to:

- national strategies and frameworks
- program progress reports
- budget documentation
- annual reports
- power point presentations of activity updates
- meeting minutes of governance groups.

To supplement the information identified in the document review, and to fill any identified gaps, virtual and in-person individual and group interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders identified with the ERG. Between 6 March and 1 April 2023, 31 interviews (15 group and 16 individual) were conducted with 78 participants (see **Appendix C** for more information). In addition to interviews with key program stakeholders in Honiara, the Review team visited five schools in Guadalcanal, Central, and Western Province to speak with teachers, school leaders, parents, and students. The schools were selected in consultation with the ERG and PMT.

All interviews were conducted in line with Solomon Island cultural protocols, such as engaging in *Tok stori* and conducting interviews in Pidgin where appropriate to enable genuine participation by stakeholders (Sanga & Reynolds, 2023). Consent was obtained prior to interviews starting and all identifying details have been removed (see **Appendix E** for a copy of the consent form).

The information from the document review and interviews were jointly analysed by the Review team to identify overarching themes. Two virtual sense-making workshops were held with the ERG and other relevant stakeholders to present emerging findings and potential recommendations, and ensure they are well founded and feasible.

³ DT Global, Education Sector Support Program (ESSP) Mid-Term Evaluation Terms of Reference, 2023.

⁴ Including document clusters containing multiple documents such as quarterly reports, and meeting minutes



1.3.3 Key Considerations

This section outlines the key aspects of the Review that should be considered when using the information in this report.

This Review, like most mid-term reviews, was a cross-sectional study in that the primary data (interviews/focus groups) were collected at a single point in time. Therefore, the data and findings in this report are representative of the participants' characteristics, context, and perceptions at the time of data collection. Although cross-sectional research cannot determine causal links, it can provide a foundation for further inquiry.

The Review was based on engagement with a relatively small sample of participants. The Review timeframe limited more extensive engagement or quantitative data collection (such as through surveys) that would allow for a larger sample and more educated generalisations. However, the qualitative data allowed inquiry into experiences that cannot be translated into numbers (Patton, 2019).

The small number of stakeholder interviews meant that not all stakeholder perspectives could be captured, for example, contractors/suppliers for infrastructure projects, curriculum and professional development projects, and the Teachers in Training program. To mitigate this, the Review team interviewed TA and MEHRD staff who worked with suppliers in these areas and had knowledge about their work.

The data gaps in the MEL datasets and missing targets in the Program's MEL framework (2021-23) also posed challenges for the Review team in making judgements on the progress and effectiveness of outcomes.

As this was a mid-term review, making evaluative judgments in relation to the Program's achievement of its EOPOs would have been unrealistic. As such, the Review provided an assessment of the Program's progress towards the EOPOs and achievement of IOs, and where possible, descriptive data was used to enhance the Program's baseline dataset for future measurement of changes over time.

Overall, it should be noted that the Review team found it challenging to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the Program because progress against intermediate outcomes is not consistently reported in the Annual Reports, the MEL Framework, and the Quarterly Reports. Further, while the Review team understands that the targets and indicators that are articulated in the Program Design Document (2019) were updated for the MEL Framework (2021-23), reporting against the targets is absent in the 2022 Annual Report, with selective reporting on outcome-related activities.

2. Review Findings

This section presents the findings of the Review, structured around the priority areas and their respective questions.

2.1 Effectiveness

To address this priority area, the Review team collected data about the extent to which the Program had been successful in progressing towards its intended outcomes. Overall, the Review found that the Program has made progress towards achieving some outcomes, especially in improving education attainment and providing a high-quality curriculum. This section describes these findings in more detail.

To what extent is the program on track towards achieving intermediate and end of program outcomes?

There were noteworthy barriers to measuring the effectiveness of the Program due to a lack of MEHRD data, including quantitative data for the end of program and intermediate outcomes. Further, the Review found that the EOPOs were ambitious given the short implementation time of the Program. While it is unlikely that the EOPOs were achievable within the life of the Program, the Review found some progress towards some of the IOs, albeit with some delays.

At this stage, it is not possible to conclude whether the Program has improved participation and completion of basic education, due to data limitations. The Review however found some evidence of improvement in learning outcomes in reading – the 2021 PILNA results showed that reading for Year 4 increased from 54% in 2018 to 60% in 2021 (DT Global 2023, p.4), though this improvement cannot be directly attributed to the Program. However, it is likely that the long-term partnership between Solomon Islands and Australia and New Zealand in the education sector has contributed to it.

In terms of reducing education related costs, according to interviews conducted during the Review, the Program has supported MEHRD to progress the ELF, which will enable schools to conduct their work in a more affordable manner and cap schools' ability to increase fees. It is anticipated that this will, in turn, increase the participation and completion rates of basic and ECE education, especially for students in remote villages.

Overall, the Review team found several challenges in ensuring equitable accessibility for students with disabilities in Solomon Islands (see [section 2.5](#)). Despite these challenges, there were some positive developments. For example, the NGO Grant modality has been progressing well, enabling NGOs to conduct various projects in the communities which raise awareness of GEDSI issues.

Progressing EOPO 4 remained challenging and, according to interviews with MEHRD staff and members of the PMT, MEHRD faced challenges communicating with Education Authorities. Therefore, it is too early to report on EOPO 4 and the corresponding intermediate outcomes. Once the ELF is in force, the decentralisation of functions to EAs will require an increased focus in this area, but is also likely provide the impetus for engagement between MEHRD and EAs.



The Review found that partnerships between the development partners (DFAT, MFAT and MEHRD) at the governance level were functioning as intended, according to members of the development partners and the PMT. However, interviews with external implementing partners indicated a desire to strengthen their relationship with MEHRD through enhanced engagement and communication (see response to question 1.1 in [section 2.1.4](#)).

2.1.1 Overall Summary of Program progress

The progress against the EOPOs and the intermediate outcomes are summarised in below. As mentioned previously, it should be noted that it is too early to observe progress against EOPOs as these outcomes could take up ten years to become apparent.

EOPO 1. Improvement in basic education participation and completion: Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress.

There were no data from 2021 onwards on net enrolment, transition, retention rates, or completion rates for basic education.

IO 1.1: More school facilities aligned to greatest need with a focus on GEDSI: Partial evidence of progress.

The existing evidence indicated some delays in progressing infrastructure projects and increased costs in some projects that led to contractual variations. The evidence also showed that many projects met the WASH standards and were gender inclusive. However, there is no evidence of it contributing to disaster risk reduction and climate resilience, meeting physical accessibility standards, and resourcing infrastructure maintenance. The current evidence also shows some progress in engaging Education Authorities and provincial government in infrastructure development.

IO 1.2: Increased availability of quality community based ECE: Sufficient evidence of progress.

There was evidence that the Program has contributed to improving the quality of ECE in selected schools by strengthening community and parental engagement in ECE, capacity building for teachers, providing teaching and learning materials and equipment, and improving the infrastructure.

IO 1.3. More learners complete basic education: Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress.

There has been no MEHRD data published on net enrolment, transition, retention, or completion rates for basic education since 2021. Therefore, the Review team was unable to assess if the Program resulted in improved completion rates.

It is also too early to assess the effectiveness of the Classroom Assessment Framework (that aims to provide schools with another form of student evaluation or classroom-based assessment, given the removal of year six exam) as the Framework has not been finalised.



IO 1.4: Cost of Education is not a barrier to learners completing basic education:
Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress.

While the Review team did not obtain any evidential information to confirm the direction of this indicator, the Review found indications of early progress. For instance, ESSP TAs have supported the development of the Education Funding Code (part of the ELF) and the Education School Fees Rules that will help address school fees issue - one of the most significant barriers to accessing education, have held a workshop to increase awareness of its implications. MEHRD also issued instructions to all EAs that the Education (School Fees) Rules of 2022 was to be referred to and implemented (DT Global, 2023, p.12).

EOP2: Improved learning outcomes in basic education (literacy and numeracy):
Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress.

The Review team did not find any evidence to directly attribute the work of the Program to the SISTA and PILNA test results.

IO 2.1: Quality curriculum and aligned resources for basic education completed and in schools:
Sufficient evidence of progress.

Per the May 2023 update from Cognition Education (supplier of textbook development, printing, and distribution), despite delays, 21 textbooks were completed, 25 were on track, work began on one textbook, and work has not started on nine more textbooks (Curriculum Development Material Status, 2023)⁵.

IO 2.2: Teachers supported by School Leaders understand and use effective teaching strategies: **Partial evidence of progress.**

While no data have been collected assessing the degree of how school leaders are able to support teachers, there is evidence indicating that the Program's efforts in the professional development of teachers and school leaders may have resulted in improved, systematic practices.

EOP3 Improved learning outcomes in basic education for disadvantaged children:
Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress.

Despite the limited data about the learning outcomes of disadvantaged children, work towards achieving this is progressing and the Program has been successful in supporting several important projects.

IO: 3.1 Teachers and School Leaders have increased skills and knowledge about inclusive pedagogy: **Partial evidence of progress.**

There is evidence indicating that teachers and school leaders have increased their knowledge and skills about inclusive pedagogy through NGO grant projects and professional development.

⁵ Cognition Education, Curriculum Development Material Status, 2023.



IO: 3.2 Parents/communities actively support children’s learning in basic education: Sufficient evidence of progress.

The existing evidence supports the progression towards this outcome. In particular, the NGO grants modality was found to be a valuable tool that helps NGOs to carry out important work in the community.

EPO4: Improved sector management by Provincial Education Authorities, schools and MEHRD: Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress.

The evidence indicated that there is insufficient communication and coordination between MEHRD, the Education Authorities and schools on infrastructure projects, and between PMT, Education Authorities and schools on NGO Grant projects.

IO: 4.1 Provincial Education Authorities have organisational systems and skills to support effective teacher management. Evidence indicates potential risk to progress.

IO: 4.2 Provincial Education Authorities have the organisational structure and resources required to support quality teaching and learning for all. Evidence indicates potential risk to progress.

The Review findings indicated that Education Authorities had access to professional development training provided by the ESSP. However, evidence also showed that Education Authorities in rural areas were not operating effectively and that communication with MEHRD could be improved. The review also found teacher management to be a problem, and that a systematic implementation of the ELF would help to address these issues.

IO: 4.3 MEHRD use SIG and A/NZ resources efficiently and effectively: Partial evidence of progress.

The current evidence shows some delays in processing payments to contractors due to complications with the SIG financial system. However, through effective technical assistance, these operational issues were resolved, upskilling MEHRD staff at the same time.

2.1.2 Assessment of progress against EOPOs and IOs

EPO 1. Improvement in basic education participation and completion

The Review team found no data on basic education participation and completion rates from 2021 onwards. There were no data reported in the annual nor quarterly progress reports on net enrolment, transition, retention, or completion rates for basic education.

IO: 1.1 More school facilities aligned to greatest need with a focus on GEDSI.

Partial Evidence

The Program has been making progress towards building adequate gender responsive school facilities and is working towards ensuring students with disabilities have the appropriate facilities to participate in school (Review interviews; MEHRD 2023; n.d). Whilst there was a target to include one project specific to students with disabilities in the Annual Work Plan, the



Review found no evidence that this has occurred (DT Global, 2023). At the time of this Review, there were only two fully accessible schools that meet the building accessibility criteria in Honiara. The Review findings from interviews with Technical Advisers, PMT, and NGOs indicate that ensuring equitable accessibility for students with disabilities is challenging for several reasons:

- There was a need for MEHRD to prioritise infrastructure projects and evaluate which provinces and schools have the greatest need for accessible schools.
- Collaboration between MEHRD and the EAs was a challenge due to MEHRD's centralised function and the lack of funding for EAs. This could be strengthened with support from ESSP (Review interviews, MEHRD 2023, n.d, DT Global 2022, 21).
- As maintenance costs are the responsibility of schools, retrofitting for accessibility can be a challenge for schools due to their limited budgets.
- The general progress on infrastructure projects has been slow since the Program commenced.
- Transportation to and from remote regions remains expensive and logistically challenging.

Further, only half of the target number of infrastructure projects have been progressed to date (DT Global, 2023; interview with PMT). The target for 2022 was to complete a minimum of 20 projects with gender-specific infrastructure split (70% boys; 30% girls) (DT Global, 2023, p.44). The split between gender-focused infrastructure is in line with the expectations of the Program members, as articulated in the 2022 Annual Report. According to interviews with the PMT and TA, the delays in processing infrastructure invoices and progressing the construction pipeline in a timely manner were largely due to MEHRD Asset Management Division's limited technical (engineering and design) capacity and the complex SIG public procurement process. However, the TA resources with engineering skills have significantly contributed to complementing and upskilling of MEHRD's Asset Management Division in this area (DT Global, 2023; Technical Assistant interviews). Progress towards this outcome was evidenced by the data showing that the ESBS funded infrastructure projects completed in 2022 included classrooms in Ngalibiu and Manawai; a science laboratory in Lilika; a girls' dormitory/ablution block in Gela Ilau; and reconstruction and refurbishment of Honiara High school following civil unrest. The completion of Manawai Community High School Classroom (remote East Malaita Province) and Gela Ilau Community High School (CHS) dormitory in Central Province, catered not only for classroom learning spaces but also girl-specific accommodation and WASH facilities (NGO interviews; DT Global, 2023).

Additionally, twelve construction tenders were advertised to the market in 2022 with ten projects awarded, including:

- one classroom (Lambi) (including one to re-tender)
- five girls' dormitories/ablution blocks (Tabaka, Siota, Allardyce, Siro, Turarana)
- one boy's dormitory (Goldie) (including one to re-tender)
- science laboratories and one attached Home Economics facility (Mbokona, Pirupiru, Vonunu)



IO: 1.2 Increased availability of quality community based ECE.

Partial Evidence

There were no supply measures for this indicator in the 2022 Annual Report. However, the Review found some indication that the NGO Grant modality was progressing well in enabling quality ECE services and training (DT Global, 2023; NGO interviews).

NGO Grants Round One commenced with three NGOs engaged (COESI, World Vision Solomon Islands STC) to work in four provinces (DT Global, 2023) and the number of children accessing ECE education in 2021 increased from 19-45% compared to 2019 in all provinces (ibid).

IO: 1.3 More learners complete basic education.

Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress

There were no net enrolment, transition, retention, or completion rates for basic education that were reported in the annual or quarterly progress reports. Therefore, the Review team was unable to assess if the Program resulted in improved completion rates.

IO: 1.4 Cost of Education is not a barrier to learners completing basic education.

Insufficient evidence available to enable an assessment of progress

Despite the unavailability of data, the Review found indications of early progress. ESSP TAs have supported the development of the Education Funding Code (part of the ELF) and the Education (School Fees) Rules. These will help to address the issue of high school fees, which is one of the most significant barriers to accessing education for many families in Solomon Islands. The ESSP TAs have also delivered a workshop to increase awareness of its the School Fees Rules, and MEHRD issued instructions to all EAs that the Education (School Fees) Rules of 2022 are to be referred to and implemented. This indicates that ESSP support has contributed to reducing the risk of students being excluded from basic education if their parent/guardian cannot pay the requested fee. Furthermore, the Program was building evidence of the costs of education to refine the school grants policy. A Finance Education Analyst will be hired to determine the cost of education per child in the Solomon Islands (DT Global, 2023). However, as this is in early stages, the Review is unable to comment on any evidence of progress.

EPO2: Improved learning outcomes in basic education (literacy and numeracy)

IO: 2.1 Quality curriculum and aligned resources for basic education completed and in schools.

Sufficient Evidence

At the time of this Review, Cognition Education and MEHRD were continuing the development of curriculum resources. A local team of writers and subject matter experts conducted collaborative workshops to identify gaps in student knowledge and learning as part of the curriculum development process. The Review found that the materials included elements of GEDSI with a focus on promoting vernacular languages (DT Global, 2023).



In reference to the May 2023 update from Cognition Education, 21 textbooks were completed, 25 were on track, work began on one textbook, and work has not started on nine more textbooks (Curriculum Development Material Status, 2023).⁶

According to the Review interviews, there have been substantial delays in finalising the content and printing textbooks with Cognition Education. Based on the document analysis, these delays were due to two factors: complications with processing Cognition Education's contracts with the Solomon Islands Government financial system, as this contract is funded through the ESBS modality; and delays in developing, printing, and distributing the textbooks due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

IO: 2.2 Teachers supported by School Leaders understand and use effective teaching strategies.

Partial Evidence

Over 2021/22, Cognition Education worked closely with MEHRD and EA personnel and exceeded their target of providing professional development across seven provinces, reaching 200 schools, 850 school leaders, and teachers through leadership workshops. According to the 2023 Annual Report, there was strong collaboration and shared planning between Provincial Education Authorities and the Teacher Training and Development Office.

Furthermore, curriculum and professional development materials were provided to schools and school leaders on flash drives (DT Global, 2023). The 2022 Annual Report revealed a 100% satisfaction rate from the participants who undertook the professional development training, and the professional development program has reached to some remote areas including Shortland Islands, Renbel province and Guadalcanal's Weather Coast. However, the Review found that access to professional development training remained sparse in rural and remote areas due to geographic or transportation challenges. The use of online learning platforms was being tested to address this issue. However, there was no evidence available to evaluate this the success of online learning platforms.

The Program made noteworthy progress on the Teacher in Training project, which aimed to train teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to improve their practice. At the time of this Review, the project was being delivered by University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Solomon Islands National University (SINU) and caters for approximately 577 untrained teachers (p.10). Given the geographic challenges, training was delivered in person and through various online platforms, and the commencement and completion rates are in line with the set targets (ibid).

EOP03: Improved learning outcomes in basic education for disadvantaged children

IO: 3.1 Teachers and School Leaders have increased skills and knowledge about inclusive pedagogy.

Partial Evidence

⁶ Cognition Education, Curriculum Development Material Status, 2023.



The World Vision Solomon Islands baseline report found that parents and school teachers agreed with the rights of children with disabilities to education but had limited understanding of the different types of disabilities. For example, according to the report, the teachers and school leaders did not feel equipped with the necessary skills to provide disability inclusive education. Additionally, schools and communities lacked the resources and communication skills necessary to effectively include people with disabilities.

The professional development activities delivered by Cognition Education provided teachers with training in a wide range of inclusive strategies. The feedback from participants was positive about their confidence to apply the new inclusive education practices and approaches in schools. School monitoring activities undertaken by the Cognition Education indicate that inclusive practices were emerging in almost half of classrooms observed. However, at this stage, it is too early to confirm if teachers and school leaders have increased skills and knowledge about inclusive pedagogy. The progress against professional development activities will be assessed and reported by Cognition Education at the end of their project.

The Solomon Islands National Policy to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls 2016–2020 provides a framework for implementing Solomon Islands' commitments to eliminating violence against women and girls. Additionally, a contractor who has been educated in supporting children who are disabled was recently employed on a short-term basis and will soon become a permanent staff member within MEHRD (DT Global, 2023).

IO: 3.2 Parents/communities actively support children's learning in basic education.

Sufficient Evidence

At the time of this Review, the NGO grants modality continued to assist NGOs in their work in the community. For example, World Vision Solomon Islands' project aimed to ensure that schools in target locations were promoting education in communities, particularly for disadvantaged children in remote communities. The project trained school leaders, committee members, parents and staff on education, disability inclusion, child protection, gender equality, and social welfare through interactive workshops. Further, 445 parents and caregivers received mentorship on disability education and child protection through interactive workshops (DT Global 2023).

The second NGO grant funded project for the World Vision Solomon Islands, Pikinini Rural Inclusion, Care and Education (PRICE), was focused on ensuring that disadvantaged children in basic education in Temotu were included and safe. The project partnered with ten primary schools and their communities, as well as government agencies and Provincial Education Authorities, to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children (ibid).

EPO4: Improved sector management by Provincial Education Authorities, schools and MEHRD

IO: 4.1 Provincial Education Authorities have organisational systems and skills to support effective teacher management.

Evidence indicates potential risk to progress.

IO: 4.2 Provincial Education Authorities have the organisational structure and resources required to support quality teaching and learning for all.

**Evidence indicates potential risk to progress.**

Given that EOPO 4 and its corresponding intermediate outcomes were highly related, the findings are reported together in this section. The Review team discovered that Provincial Education Authorities in rural areas were not operating in the most effective manner and that communication with MEHRD could be improved. Regarding poor teacher management, the Review indicated that a systematic implementation of the ELF, the development of which has been supported through ESSP, will address the following:

- uncertainty about teacher employment and qualification criteria
- lack of clarity about teacher registration processes
- issues with paying teachers on time
- lack of clarity on career progression pathways for teachers, affecting motivation, resulting in poor quality of teaching and learning
- high turnover of school leaders and the need for better recruitment, induction, support, and performance appraisal processes.

IO: 4.3 MEHRD use the Solomon Islands Government and Australia / New Zealand resources efficiently and effectively.

Partial Evidence

The Review team found several delays in processing payments to contractors due to complications with the Solomon Islands Government financial and procurement system. However, through the effective Program technical assistance, the capability of MEHRD staff in the teaching and learning, finance, and procurement has improved (DT Global, 2023). As evidenced in the annual and progress reports, some notable achievements that reflected the progress towards this outcome included using tender document templates that were developed and socialised to the Procurement Unit staff. These improved the quality of tender documentation, increased the number of No Objection Letters, and improved MEHRD Finance and MOFT payments process with high turn around. All these improvements have contributed to increased ESBS budget spending.

2.1.3 What factors most supported progress towards outcomes and what were the most significant barriers?

The funding of the five complementary modalities and the agile partnership approach were the most important factors that supported progress towards meeting the Program outcomes. Overall, the Review found that the budget support was effective in achieving its results related to teacher training, curriculum development, and progressing infrastructure projects, albeit with some delays and the need for better prioritisation of the latter. The targeted capacity development support, focused on key areas of MEHRD's work program has contributed to progressing delivery of ESBS and the ELF. Collaboration through policy dialogue also



contributed to the implementation of the ESBS and Capacity Development modalities. The main barrier is the limited absorptive capacity of MEHRD, challenges in communication and collaboration between MEHRD and EAs, and limited capacity in education management by EAs.

2.1.4 Effectiveness of modalities

Earmarked Sector Budget Support (ESBS)

Overall, the Review found the budget support to be effective in terms of achieving its results and meeting the needs of target populations. Feedback from interviews with teachers and students indicates that they are satisfied with Program support. However, there were challenges that should be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of this modality, which are discussed below.

Infrastructure

The lack of a transparent and equitable process for selecting beneficiary schools for infrastructure projects remains a key challenge. Currently, there is no framework nor standardised process in place, including consultation processes with Education Authorities and schools, to ensure transparency, accountability, and equity in school selection.

“We don’t have good infrastructure plan within MEHRD... Education Authorities send a wish list to us and then we just pick which schools are priorities (which schools to build a classroom or dormitory). Because the demand is so high, I mean, all the schools like to have all the infrastructure classroom ... we’re just strategically looking at, OK, which one would ESSP go into? And if there is a fund from the provincial government there. We might pick the other one that has not been fully supported.” – MEHRD staff

The selection of beneficiary schools was based on information from EAs, with priority given to low socio-economic provinces and remote areas. However, the lack of a standard process and involvement of EAs in the decision-making process led to some EAs being unaware of the Program's support or disagreeing with MEHRD's decisions about which schools to select. Further, some EAs expressed in interviews that they were either unaware of any Program support to the schools under their management, or unsure whether the support was from the Program. A representative from one EA reported that the beneficiary school is not the most disadvantaged school or the top priority in their hierarchy of priorities. This accordingly raised a need for better communication and stronger engagement with EAs in the school selection process. At the EA level, there is also a need for engagement and communication with schools to ensure that the school selection process is transparent and accountable to all the schools under their management.

The absence of a school infrastructure and facilities database at MEHRD also posed another challenge in the school selection process. In other words, MEHRD does not have data to identify which schools are the most disadvantaged and what kinds of infrastructure or facilities they need. The PMT interview revealed that the Program was aware of the challenge of collecting infrastructure data. The Asset Management TA developed a spreadsheet to capture this data, but data collection had not yet begun at the time of drafting this report. The EA



representatives interviewed believed they could help with the inventory at a school level, but this is currently beyond their capacity due to limited operational resources and transportation challenges in Solomon Islands, such as poor road conditions and long distances between islands. The Program could support MEHRD to develop more strategic approaches to school infrastructure data management and prioritisation that align with long-term Solomon Islands Education Management Information System (SIEMIS) plans.

Communication and involvement with beneficiary schools in the design process is another key challenge that the Program could better support. The interviews with the schools indicated that there was miscommunication between the Program and the beneficiary schools. It was noted by a Governance Committee member that there was no Terms of Reference (ToR) nor a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Program and the schools that specified the co-funding or contributions from schools to the infrastructure projects. For example, a female dormitory in the Gela Ilau school has been completed but no beds were provided. Another issue reported by some schools is that they were not adequately consulted about the design aspects of the infrastructure projects. Therefore, in some cases, the support did not fully meet the needs of the schools. For instance, one school interviewed was concerned about the classroom size, the ablution capacity, and the capacity of water tanks to operate the ablution block (especially during dry seasons). Lack of consultation with the schools also led to incomplete understanding about the future or local risks associated with the infrastructure projects. For example, one school where a classroom was being built raised a concern about the lease in the future because it is located on private land owned by a businessperson. Local culture and land disputes were also reported as challenges to progressing infrastructure projects that eventually led to contractual variations. While the ELF may assist with standardising processes, a written agreement between MEHRD and schools would help, as well as improved communication and engagement with the Provincial Education Board and the schools throughout the design process.

Curriculum Development and Professional Development

In line with the positive feedback about the effectiveness of professional development support highlighted in DT Global (2023), the Review team received positive feedback from the Education Authorities and schools that were interviewed. They considered the school leadership training to be helpful for their leadership and teaching. As the curriculum is yet to be used, it is not possible to assess its success at this stage. However, the participatory approach adopted to develop the curriculum, and mobilising local writers and subject matter experts supported by an international editor could ensure the relevance and usability of its contents in the Solomon Island education context.

Despite achievements in curriculum and professional development, Education Authorities also highlighted that traditional skills and values should be incorporated in the curriculum.

Traditional skills and values should be considered also in the curriculum ... currently they are not in the curriculum, for example, carving skills. Western province and Renbel are good at this...

Curriculum should also consider skills based, not only theory based – like carving; carving is an industry in the Solomon Islands – Education Authorities



Interviews also highlighted a concern about the alignment of professional development materials with the ELF standards. This suggests that greater engagement is required between the curriculum development service provider and MEHRD's teams working on progressing the ELF.

Teachers in training

The review found that Teachers in Training, another form of professional development training, is highly appreciated by the Governance Committee members and MEHRD staff for improving the quality of teaching. Through Teachers in Training, untrained and unqualified teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to improve the quality of their teaching and thereby contribute to the learning ability of their students. However, there have been challenges for some teachers to participate in Teachers in Training. For example, some teachers faced financial constraints, and some prioritised their responsibilities towards their (often large), extended families over their professional development. Distance was also another factor that challenged the participation of some teachers. Since the COVID-19 lockdown, the Program has provided some distance learning in response to geographic obstacles. While this flexibility is appreciated, there remains some concerns about the Wi-Fi connectivity of schools, particularly located in remote areas.

MEHRD faces challenges accessing information from Education Authorities for enrolment related paperwork. The Review found that some Education Authorities do not have sufficient information about teachers, which is a problem for record keeping. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the new SIEMIS to address such gaps in data management. Interviews with MEHRD staff revealed that there was a lack of understanding about the requirements and conflicts between document requirements. This was due to a lack of communication between MEHRD and the implementing partners (SINU and USP). As a result, there were delays in progressing the project, such as enrolling teachers in the Teachers in Training program.

Focus of budget support and trade-offs with absorptive capacity

According to the annual reports and the interview with the Governance Committee members, there was a concern about the absorptive capacity of MEHRD in terms of both human resources and technical expertise to adequately manage infrastructure projects and significant projects like curriculum and professional development.

MEHRD doesn't have technical structural engineers so depend on other stakeholders like provincial government as they have employed their engineers through the Provincial Capacity Development Fund. So we utilise those ones only for certain provinces. For others, we depend on our knowledge. – MEHRD staff

This limited absorptive capacity, in addition to other external factors beyond MEHRD's control, such as long procurement processes with SIG finance systems, disconnected budget cycles⁷ and work planning processes, and SIG recruitment processes (that do not always allow

⁷ The SIG financial year is the calendar year (Jan-Dec) while the MFAT and DFAT financial year is July-June. Furthermore, MFAT is paying ESBS in advance whereas DFAT is paying in arrears on evidence of expenditure. See further discussions in Section 2.3. Efficiency



MEHRD to recruit staff at the time they need), resulted in some delays in implementing the ESBS activities.

Additionally, interviews revealed that there is a tension in that successful delivery of large infrastructure or curriculum and professional development projects may require MEHRD to allocate additional staff to lead and manage these projects, which could compromise the quality of their 'business as usual' activities.

Given the absorptive capacity issues of MEHRD, there are mixed views from the participants about whether the scope of ESBS should be reduced. For instance, some stakeholders suggested that some components such as infrastructure or curriculum and professional development contracts can be managed by the PMT given their accountability and transparency systems. Others consider there is an opportunity to reduce the scope of ESBS and transfer the funding to the other modalities such as NGO Grants. Meanwhile, with the improved capacity of MEHRD because of TA support, some view the current investment as appropriate and manageable.

Given the improvements in delivery of ESBS in 2022, the Review finds that the focus of the ESBS modality is likely appropriate for the final year of implementation. It may be useful for the Program to focus on supporting MEHRD's current human resources and technical capacity in their annual work planning, and to strengthen the monitoring so that capacity issues can be captured and addressed in a timely manner.

In the medium-term, as the ELF will devolve some of MEHRD's current functions to EAs, the scope and approach to budget support will need to be reviewed to calibrate it to the ELF's implementation. A clear approach to prioritisation of work across MEHRD and Provinces will be required to ensure that budget support is targeted based on need and that investment are implementable.

Capacity Development Fund

The Program recognised the value of a "local first" approach in capacity development. This is reflected through increasing the number of local TAs and the Yumi Fastaem (that forms part of the Capacity Development Framework). Utilising local TAs can increase the effectiveness of support as it leverages their expertise, local understanding, relationships, and networks. The PMT stated that local TAs are better equipped to address day-to-day issues that may be challenging for international TA, particularly those working remotely. In areas where local expertise may be limited or stretched, a hybrid approach may be favourable with international TAs working in parallel with local TAs to provide technical support or capacity building.

Capacity building

There is some evidence indicating improvement in the capacity of MEHRD staff, especially in areas such as finance, procurement, strategic planning, and teaching, due to the capacity building support from the ESSP TAs. For instance, the ESSP's Procurement, Finance and Asset Management TAs supported MEHRD to develop a budget pipeline tool and then trained MEHRD's finance team in utilising the tool for budget monitoring. The tool has been utilised throughout the period to regularly monitor and report to development partners on ESBS spending and underspend. From the interviews with TAs, it is also evident that MEHRD's



procurement team improved their confidence and skills in leading the procurement work and contract negotiations, which they attribute to the capacity building support and mentorship from the Procurement TA. This evidence indicates the positive impact of capacity development efforts.

One challenge that remains is the uneven distribution of TA across key departments and divisions within MEHRD. This can hinder their capacity to engage or deliver Program activities. Addressing this disparity and ensuring that all departments receive adequate support should be a priority and this can be achieved with comprehensive capacity assessment.

Capacity Development Framework

There have been mixed views regarding the effectiveness of the Capacity Development Framework as a tool for prioritisation. On one hand, it is considered effective in assisting MEHRD in identifying capacity needs and determining whether local or international TA can address those needs. The framework helps in matching specific capacity requirements with appropriate resources with a priority given to local expertise.

However, some expectations of the Framework extend beyond its current capabilities. The interview with MEHRD staff showed that there is a desire for the framework to not only address the “how” aspect of capacity development but also provide insights into the “what” – the individual and organisational capacities required to achieve the desired outcomes of the NEAP or ELF implementation. The Review also found several challenges associated with the Yumi Fastaem tool. There is a lack of comprehensive data regarding local expertise, particularly in the provinces, which hampers the ability to fully leverage and utilise the available talent pool.

Meeting all the capacity needs of schools throughout the country will be a challenge for MEHRD given its limited resources. There is currently no established mechanism for coordinating similar capacity needs across schools or Education Authorities, which could enhance efficiency in terms of time and resource allocation. The absence of a coordinated approach may lead to duplicated efforts and suboptimal utilisation of resources. To address the capacity needs of the education sector, the Program could support MEHRD to establish coordinating mechanisms, prioritise capacity-building efforts based on critical needs that are aligned with its outcomes, and explore additional funding sources through utilising the existing policy dialogue platforms (e.g. EDPCG) or opening new platforms to engage with other stakeholders and donors in the education sector.

NGO Grants

While the NGO Grant modality has delivered effective results in communities (see Section 2.1.2), there are some key factors that could improve effectiveness.

Engagement with MEHRD, EAs, and parents and communities

Some NGOs reported facing difficulties in effectively engaging with MEHRD in their NGO Grant projects in the early stage of involvement with the Program. However, with the facilitation of the PMT, the NGOs successfully engaged with MEHRD through NGO *Tok Stori* workshops. One of the positive outcomes from this engagement is that this has strengthened the

relationships between MEHRD and NGOs in supporting and complementing service delivery, particularly at the grassroots level.

Apart from the Inclusive Education Solomon Islands project, the interviews with schools highlighted that there has been limited engagement between NGOs and Education Authorities, and MEHRD staff also indicated the lack of leadership from Education Authorities. Insufficient engagement and leadership of Education Authorities may hinder the scalability and sustainability of initiatives that the NGO Grants have created.

Engaging parents and communities can be challenging as they are often occupied with earning a living. It was noted in the interviews with schools that some families are unemployed and struggling to pay school fees. Parents' limited awareness and understanding of the importance of education also hindered their active participation and collaboration between NGOs, parents, and schools.

Awareness/knowledge of NGOs about the ELF

Some NGOs and grantees have limited understanding of the ELF requirements in their specific areas of operation. This lack of awareness hinders their ability to align their projects and initiatives with the goals and guidelines of the ELF. Providing support and guidance to NGO grantees regarding ELF requirements can help ensure better alignment and maximise the impact of their interventions.

Limited opportunities for local NGOs to participate

While the Program is moving forward to localisation, the current requirements about due diligence may have indirectly excluded local NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). This may have some impact on the sustainability of outcomes the NGO Grant projects have achieved.

Performance Linked Aid

The Review found that the implementation of the PLA modality does not appear to be achieving its purpose. The intent of the PLA modality is for DFAT (in consultation with MFAT) to work collaboratively with MEHRD to identify and set agreed performance targets and to provide financial incentives to achieve those targets. If the benchmarks are not achieved, the funds may be reduced, leading to delayed activities which correspond to those targets. In 2022, while progress was made in some areas, there are several activities in MEHRD Annual Workplan that have not been carried out or have been delayed due to COVID-19 lockdowns. As a result, the release of PLA funding has been delayed.

Interviewees from the PMT stated that PLA may not be a suitable modality for MEHRD as some staff members could perceive it as a way of punishing them by closely examining their performance. Another possible reason highlighted in the annual reports is that managers do not understand the linkages between certain activities and the PLA modality, and therefore are not motivated to achieve the targets. This therefore raises an opportunity for raising awareness of MEHRD staff about the purpose of PLA.

Some participants suggested discontinuing it in the next phase and reallocating the PLA funds to another modality such as NGO Grants. The Review, however, suggests that the



Governance Committee evaluate the performance and effectiveness of the PLA modality, especially for those involved in decision-making, to determine if they should modify this modality to better meet its objectives or if they should reallocate the PLA funds to another modality that can offer more value to the targets of the Program this year and in future phases of Program funding. If performance linked aid remains in the Program, the Governance Committee needs to consider the selection of indicators that MEHRD has the ability and/or responsibility to achieve, and for which it is feasible to collect data to support evidence of progress.

Policy Dialogue

The Review found the Policy Dialogue modality to be effective, with opportunities for a more prominent role for the PMT. Policy dialogue is described in the Program design as an important implementation arrangement whereby Australian and New Zealand representatives use various methods to engage with MEHRD. The PMT plays a key role in facilitating and coordinating activities under this modality. The main avenues for policy dialogue include:

- MEHRD mid-year and annual joint reviews
- Program Governance Committee meetings and strategic meetings
- Regular engagement between MFAT, DFAT and MEHRD Senior Management Team
- Program/bilateral engagements at the ministerial level and through broader bilateral engagements (such as the Joint Policy Reform Group).
- beyond the Program, participation in the Solomon Islands Education Development Partners Coordination Group (EDPCG).

The interviews with Governance Committee members indicated that the official Governance Committee meetings and monthly strategic meetings with the Senior Management Team have added value in addressing issues arising from Program implementation. However, some MEHRD staff expressed a desire to ensure Governance Committee meetings are held more regularly to address Program problems in a timely and strategic manner.

The Review also identified a perception from some stakeholders that this modality would be enhanced if PMT played a more prominent role in strategic discussions and provided greater oversight on program priorities. According to the PMT Assessment Rubric 2023, the scope of their work could expand to identify opportunities for this modality.

2.1.5 To what extent have there been unintended consequences (positive or negative) associated with the Program's implementation?

The Review did not find many unintended consequences (either positive or negative) through the interviews and document review, except from the Capacity Development Framework. The intended output of the Capacity Development Framework project was a framework that defines



organisational and individual capacity building for MEHRD, rather than a tool (Yumi Fastaem) that supports MEHRD to identify the capacity needs and match them with local or international expertise. Though this project has not resulted in the expected outcome, on the positive side, it reflects the flexibility of the program to meet the needs of MEHRD. It is worth noting that the process to develop this tool was participatory involving *Tok Stori* consultations with a wide range of stakeholders including MEHRD, Education Authorities, TA, and Program development partners. The result of this *Tok Stori* consultation is a collective agreement to develop the tool that will be used by MEHRD and Education Authorities to identify capacity building needs to respond to the NEAP and implement the Annual Work Plan.

2.1.6 To what extent are partnerships (with specified stakeholders) effective in enabling program outcomes?

The Program is a partnership between the Governments of Solomon Islands, Australia, and New Zealand. This partnership is well grounded on the principles of development cooperation for effective development as outlined in the National Development Strategy 2016 – 2035 (Solomon Islands Government 2016). They include: (i) ownership of development priorities; (ii) focus on results where investments have a lasting impact; (iii) inclusive development partnerships that ensure openness, trust, mutual respect, and learning; and (iv) transparency and accountability.

The Review found that the current partnership is effective and productive in enabling the progress of the Program. MEHRD staff highlighted that the governance arrangements are appropriate for MEHRD to own and lead the Program. They also appreciated the Governance Committee as a formalised relationship between the three development partners, where they can work together to drive the strategy of the Program and resolve issues arising from the program implementation. As noted in the Governance Committee meeting minutes, in most of the cases, MEHRD took the initiative in making suggestions to address challenges and risks arising from Program implementation.

We [MEHRD] are given the liberty to create a budget, then get back to donors, and have approval process. If there is an issue that donors are concerned about the expenditure, we will bring concern to the table and discuss reasons. – MEHRD staff

We always try to respect that they [MEHRD] are the decision makers ... [we] are very conscious of not ever making decisions without MEHRD's endorsement. – Development Partner

All three development partners agreed that the partnership is strong, open, and transparent, which increased the adaptive ability of the program especially in context of unprecedented challenges.

The Program has been able to respond to shocks from COVID and unrest – this is a sign of strength of partnership. – Development Partner



Beyond the core Program partnership between MEHRD, DFAT, and MFAT, there have been mixed views on the partnership. There are positive relationships with the Ministry of Finance and Treasury in identifying solutions on resolving finance and procurement issues for example, and with the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening providing the information about their Provincial Capacity Development Fund (PCDF) programme and their willingness to support the Program. It is also evident that MEHRD established good relationships with provincial governments (e.g. signing MoUs with some provincial governments where there are engineers) to get technical support in carrying out the Program infrastructure projects. However, there is still room for enhancing the partnership with other agencies and organisations, such as provincial governments, (e.g. some provinces are not aware of the Program funding, which may raise a risk of duplication of infrastructure investments), the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology in planning for resilient school infrastructure, and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs on GEDSI and safeguarding (see the [section 2.5](#)).

2.2 Sustainability

The Review found that the benefits and positive impacts from infrastructure projects, capacity development and NGO Grant projects were likely to be sustainable. However, ongoing funding will be required to maintain its progress.

This section elaborates on these findings. It should be noted that a lack of an exit strategy or a sustainability plan in the final year of the Program increases the vulnerability of its achievements in the future.

2.2.1 What factors supported sustainable change and what were the most significant barriers?

The information collected during the Review indicated that it is likely that positive changes achieved through the Program would be sustained after the funding period concludes. This was largely related to investment in tangible outputs. For example, the improvements in infrastructure would continue to secure and increase accessibility and well-being for students. The new curriculum materials and professional development guidebooks would continue to benefit the teachers and students. Moreover, the tools and procedures (e.g., Yumi Fastaem tool, GEDSI tool, finance guidelines) and capacity built for MEHRD, Education Authorities, and schools would continue to support MEHRD's functions. Positive changes in terms of knowledge and attitudes of communities and parents achieved through NGO Grant projects would continue to benefit children, particularly disadvantaged children, in going to school and participating in society. Knowledge and experience obtained by local Technical Advisors through working with MEHRD would continue to benefit the education sector. The improvement of children's literacy and numeracy will likely be sustained thanks to the new curriculum materials and leadership and teaching capacity equipped for teachers.

However, there remain challenges to sustain positive changes. One of the key challenges highlighted in the interviews with stakeholders was lack of funding to maintain infrastructure, maintain tools and equipment (e.g., spark kits) provided to aid students' learning, continue community / parent awareness raising and training activities (e.g., sign language training for community), and continue professional development for schoolteachers. Another concern



raised by MEHRD staff was the limited capacity, time, and resources to support and sustain good practices and models created by the Program. This therefore requires the Program to consider longer timeframes for funding and capacity building support.

To think about sustainability... We're thinking about trying to strengthen the organisational capacity for us to be able to slowly transition... [Therefore] We don't fund teacher salaries, school grants, school ongoing recurrent expenses. So our funding goes entirely towards non-recurring expenses or construction, teaching and learning, and capacity building work. Long term goal is improving organisational capacity of education management. – Development Partner

While support to NGOs has been beneficial, there was limited engagement of local NGOs or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the NGO Grant modality. As discussed previously, this is likely due difficulties faced by local partners in meeting Commonwealth due diligence requirements to participate in the NGO Grant. To increase the participation of local NGOs and CSOs, the Program should consider how it can best increase capability of local partners to meet the requirements. While the PMT has provided some advice and information in the past, it may be that more formal capability support may be required to increase access of the modality to local partners. Alternative ways of channelling the funding may also be considered (e.g. through ESBS, with capacity support) to enable SIG procurement rules to apply, which would also increase ownership of the NGO grant modality by MEHRD. Increased local NGO participation would promote local ownership in program implementation, that accordingly will contribute to the sustainability of the positive impacts or changes achieved.

Furthermore, the Solomon Islands education system has been reliant on external consultants (i.e., international TA) to perform some functions. This may pose some risks for knowledge retention and the sustainability of the work after the external consultants depart. As discussed earlier, the Program implementers were aware of this risk. Therefore, the Program is increasingly localising and funding TA positions where local expertise is available to ensure the knowledge will be retained in the country and continue to benefit the education sector.

The interview with PMT indicated that TA are always encouraged to think about the sustainability of their work, and there is some evidence of considerations of sustainability in other projects (e.g. Infrastructure, CD/PD).

...he [Asset Management TA] has developed a spreadsheet that has a pivot table, and you know, and I said as long as you leave that with somebody, at least that's sustainable for now...[we're] trying to ask what to leave behind...

[PMT is] trying to get SIG ICT to host the web tool so it can be sustainable. - PMT

However, there is currently no sustainability strategy in place to guide the implementing partners to consider sustainability in their work (e.g., what should be in place to sustain positive changes or outcomes from their project after their project is completed?). This poses a significant barrier to answering the following:



- How will the capacity of Education Authorities be built (and how will they be funded) so they can effectively undertake responsibilities in education management, especially as they are currently underperforming in this area?
- How will NGOs be funded to undertake their work in ECE and community education if this aspect continues to be part of the Program?
- How will MEHRD be funded to ensure they are effective in the timely delivery of newbuild infrastructure projects which meets the needs of the schools?

Therefore, this raises an opportunity for the Program to consider developing a sustainability strategy to guide sustainability considerations in all its aspects, as presented in [section 3](#).

2.2.2 Are any initiatives established over the past 5,10, or 20 years still active? How have any lessons learned been applied and how has this contributed to the sustainability of the initiative?⁸

The Review found evidence relating to previous initiatives called the Literacy Program Management Unit (LPMU) and the Leaders and Education Authorities (LEAP) program that were being used in the Program. The LPMU consisted of an international and national expert along with Provincial Literacy Trainers (*Allen + Clarke, 2019*). LEAP was designed to improve the literacy of children in selected primary schools in the Solomon Islands through supporting schools and Provincial Education Authorities. Some LEAP mentors and Provincial Literacy Trainers have been employed to deliver leadership workshops to selected schools (*ibid*).

The key aspects of these programs have been adapted to the design of the Program (Program Design Document, 2019-23). For instance, the focus of the Program, like the LPMU and LEAP programs, was on basic and ECE. Further, leadership and capacity building workshops remained a key component of the professional development process for teachers, education authorities, and MEHRD staff. These aspects of the Program were important, as evidenced by research that demonstrated that equitable access and success in education were heavily dependent on the quality of school leadership (for example, principals and teachers with positive attitudes towards teaching and learning [*Iromea, & Reynolds, 2021*]). Incorporating the leadership training elements into the Program was likely to bolster the sustainability of improvements in teaching and learning quality.

LEAP achieved mixed success (*Allen + Clarke, 2019*). However, as discussed under EOPO 4, there were indications of issues related to managing teachers and coordinating the roles of the Provincial Education Authorities, even after LEAP made efforts to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of Provincial Education Authority.

The financial management of the Education Small Grants Facility was available to Provincial Education Authorities participating in LEAP and should have continued under the Program, but this grant has not been provided yet, constraining the capabilities of the Education Authorities. The LEAP evaluation (*Allen + Clarke, 2019*) suggested that MEHRD should

⁸ Note that this section responds to questions 2.2 and 2.3 in the Review Framework

ensure their plans are better aligned with the activities being undertaken in the provinces. Although this issue persists, the implementation of the ELF will help minimise it.

2.3 Efficiency

Overall, the Review findings indicated that the funding modalities were mostly being used in an efficient manner. The model of partnerships at the Program governance level, at the time of this Review, supported efficient delivery of the Program but could be strengthened with Education Authorities, NGOs, and schools.

2.3.1 To what extent are the program management team and respective program delivery modalities making efficient use of time and resources to achieve program outcomes?

The Review found that the PMT has fulfilled its functions in supporting the operation of the Program. According to the PMT Performance Rubric, stakeholders were generally satisfied with PMT's performance. This reflects the value for money of having the PMT in the Program.

The PMT supported the partners to achieve the outcomes of the Program by playing a central role in coordinating strategic meetings, providing day-to-day operational and administrative support to DFAT, MFAT and MEHRD and aiding in decision-making. The PMT has worked closely with MEHRD to identify their capacity needs and has managed the deployment of Technical Assistance efficiently to support delivery of the ESBS budget. For example, the Finance and Procurement Advisors supported MEHRD to work with MOFT and developed efficient financial processes for a smoother implementation process.

As evidenced in DT Global 2023, the PMT played in donor coordination and cross sector strategic engagement. The PMT worked with TAs to ensure they incorporated support provided through PacRef and provide general support for meetings with donors. As part of the PMT's wider coordination function, the team plays a key role in supporting the Governance Committee, leading strategic workshops and engages with several regional and donor programs. It has also been actively coordinating and collaborating with partners in the education sector. The Program has built strong relationships between partners, and there is an opportunity to focus more on the strategic convening.

For example, it is suggested that the PMT should ensure that GEDSI is included in all Program activities and provide evidence of how TAs have influenced the GEDSI policy within the Program. Further, capacity development should be more strategically planned (e.g. identifying strategic priorities for capacity development and developing ToRs ahead of time). It is suggested that the PMT should also articulate clearly how they contribute to supporting capacity building over direct delivery. Further, regular updates of ESBS tracking of expenditure and progress are needed and it is suggested that the PMT should be more involved in strategic financial management to better meet the needs of donors (PMT Performance Rubric, 2023).

In summary, the Review finds that the PMT can improve their support of partners by being more proactive in managing risks and opportunities, establishing regular dialogue and working



groups, providing capacity development, collaborating with DFAT and MFAT governance and gender equality programs, mainstreaming GEDSI, utilising NGO expertise, improving MEHRD coordination, providing regular expenditure and progress updates, engaging in strategic financial management, and articulating their contributions to capacity building.

While spend is not necessarily an indicator of efficiency, it provides a framework for enquiry into how time and money was invested. It can help to frame a line of enquiry into whether underspend is the result of obstacles the program faces in delivering its planned annual work program or may be an indicator of more efficient use of funding. The Review therefore examined data on spend against the different modalities in 2021 and 2022.

As with all on-budget donor financial support, ESBS procurement and spending operates within the SIG rules. The implementation of the centralised D365 system has added additional complexity and caused some delays in making payments and progressing activities. This was evidenced in delays in processing a contract for Cognition Education to develop, print and deliver textbooks (PMT interviews, DT Global, 2023). The pandemic further delayed the distribution of the textbooks (ibid).

Despite some of these challenges, MEHRD, with support from the Program Finance Adviser, have progressed the ESBS work programme increasing budget execution in 2022 to 62% in 2022 from 44% in 2021. Infrastructure projects have faced several delays due to challenges such as the implementation of D365 and staffing capacity challenges within MEHRD's Asset Management Division (AMD). The Review team found that the current AMD workforce (while skilled in their roles) does not include formally trained engineers⁹ or project managers. Technical engineering issues have affected AMD's ability to manage infrastructure projects (DT Global 2023). To improve efficiency of the ESBS modality, there is an opportunity for MEHRD to work with MOFT to develop improved processes that would facilitate more efficient procurement and financial management. Previous evaluations in Solomon Islands (such as the [Mekem Strong Solomon Islands Fisheries Evaluation](#)) have identified instances where individuals in SIG Ministries have achieved efficient management of budget support through rigorous process (Allen + Clarke, 2018).

The spending for CDF in 2022 was lower than expected because some international TA returned overseas unexpectedly and local TA were recruited, lowering the cost. Transitioning from reliance on international TA resources to making use of local capacity both represents a more efficient use of funding but is also important for future sustainability and capability retention. There is a strong desire amongst stakeholders to further localise TA and other positions. However, given that the Program is just one education sector investment in Solomon Islands, there are likely to be capacity constraints towards achieving localisation. Blended modalities of remote international support with local capacity may prove a useful approach

⁹ Building infrastructure is not core business of MEHRD in terms of its legislative functions under the Education Act. Furthermore, the shortage of formally trained engineers in government agencies, even in Ministry of Infrastructure Development, is currently prevalent. With increasing investments from various donors (e.g. China, Japan, ADB) in infrastructure in Solomon Islands, there is a high demand for trained engineers for infrastructure projects. As a result, many engineers from government agencies moved to work for private construction companies.



towards achieving localisation. Articulating a strategic approach to localisation would be useful to guide continued implementation of the Program.

The PMT's spending has decreased compared to 2021. There were some delays in progressing some of the elements of the work programme that are linked to MEHRD activities. For example, the decision to use SIG ICT systems to host the Yumi Fastaem web-based tool caused delays in coordination with central SIG systems. Despite these delays, using SIG systems will likely increase the sustainability of the investment and may therefore represent a more efficient use of funding.

The spend of the NGO Grant modality remained relatively consistent, with the bulk of funding invested into activities such as WASH projects, parental/community education, and curriculum development in vernacular languages promoting inclusivity in the ECE and GEDSI and safeguarding areas. NGO proposals are assessed by a panel with MEHRD, DFAT and MFAT representatives against a set of criteria that includes value for money. The panel has included MEHRD's Chief Accountant, and the procurement evaluation report indicates a close review of the proposed budgets. However, while the 2022 Annual Report notes that spending is in line with contracts the below target spend may indicate that proposed budgets are over-ambitious in terms of their delivery capacity or that there is a timing issue between the selection process and delivery. It would be worthwhile to investigate this further to ensure that annual budget planning is as accurate as possible.

The Review found that the spending in the PLA modality was often delayed. For instance, a report on progress towards agreed PLA indicators prepared by MEHRD with TA support, recommending a payment was submitted to MEHRD senior management in June 2022, but this had yet to be approved and therefore no payment had been made by Mar 2023. This indicates that the modality is not providing the right incentive structure for MEHRD to progress work in areas of agreed indicators or to approve a report required to trigger a payment. The review therefore does not find the PLA to be an efficient modality in its current form or governance environment.

2.3.2 To what extent are resources being used in the most efficient way to provide value for money?

Overall, resources are being used in an efficient and complementary way that leverages value in each of them to deliver the Program. In particular, the complementarity between ESBS and the Capacity Development Fund is an important component of the Program's efficiency. The alignment of the ESBS to MEHRD's annual work program ensures that investment supports progress of SIG priorities ensuring a focus and ownership of delivery. Ensuring TA is provided in areas that are complementary to ESBS increases its efficiency. The Capacity Development Framework and Yumi Fastaem tool can support identification of priorities for capacity building that align to MEHRD priorities and delivery of the ESBS. For example, funding finance and asset management TA helps to ensure that MEHRD's infrastructure program can be progressed faster than would otherwise be possible.

Supporting NGOs to promote GEDSI and safeguarding in basic education is an efficient way to approach these cross-cutting areas. Achieving progress in these areas requires community level engagement, which Government is typically not as well placed to do as NGOs. In



addition, the work the NGOs are delivering in ECE allows for progress in a sub-sector that is not the core focus of the Program but critical to educational achievement in Solomon Islands.

As the Program is relatively complex, with multiple investment modalities, an independent PMT ensures the co-ordination of the investments. Adaptive management also requires dedicated resourcing and management of Program monitoring and evaluation data. Facilitating learning and reflection between Program partners can often benefit from independence as well. For these reasons, the investment in the PMT increases the relative efficiency of the other modalities.

Performance Linked Aid is the only modality that is not efficient. While the design of the modality has incorporated lessons from past experiences in Solomon Islands (Program Design Document), it is evident that it is still not providing the necessary incentives and as a result the funding of PLA 2021 was delayed being disbursed in 2022.

2.3.3 Assessment against DFAT's Value for Money Principles

As this was a Mid-Term Review of the Program, the Review team did not propose to undertake a return-on-investment exercise. We have instead undertaken a Value for Money assessment of the Program based on [DFAT's Value for Money Principles](#).

Cost Consciousness:

Decision makers scrutinise programming costs throughout the investment lifecycle to ensure the most cost-effective options are pursued.

The Review team found evidence of cost consciousness through the work of the Program Governance Committee that authorises changes to financial delivery based on emerging needs.

Evidence of Governance Committee reviews

The Governance Committee reviews and approves the annual and quarterly workplans of the Program. It meets quarterly to review progress against the joint objectives, performance indicators, commitments, and accountability of the Program. The Development Partners also noted that decision-making outside of formal meetings (via phone and e-mail) has been practical (Governance Committee meeting minutes, 2022).

Re-allocating funding to meet emerging needs

The Program was responsive to emerging urgent needs by reallocating its funding to meet the needs of MEHRD in various instances. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Program allocated funding from the NGO Grants modality to two COVID-19 response projects run by Save the Children and UNICEF. These projects supported schools in responding to the pandemic by constructing WASH facilities and developing COVID-19 contingency and response plans. In response to the 2021 riot that damaged some schools, the Program allocated funding to rehabilitate the damaged buildings at Honiara High School.



Changing an approach to deliver a workstream

The Governance Committee established the Expenditure and Risk Management Sub-Committee to address the long-standing underspend issues of the ESBS modality and to explore alternative approaches to better deliver emergent activities within ESBS. The Sub-Committee met in October 2022 and made recommendations around finance, procurement, and asset management. While some of the recommendations are under consideration, the Sub-Committee's work demonstrates the responsiveness of the Governance Committee in addressing issues related to financial inefficiencies.

Encouraging Competition:

Consider and compare competing methods and partners to select that option that offers the optimal mix of costs and benefits – competitive selection processes.

The Review interviews and document review indicates that the Program selects:

- TA and NGOs based on merit, experience, and capacity for delivering specialist services
- external contractors such as Cognition Education is also based on the company's expertise in the field.

Further, as the ESBS modality follows SIG procurement guidelines, all goods and services procured in line with MEHRD's annual work plan would be in line with procurement standards and competitive tendering. It should also be noted that the PMT regularly engages with the Governance Committee to review the achievements and bottlenecks associated with the different modalities (Interviews with PMT and Technical Assistants, Governance Committee minutes, progress reports).

Evidence Based Decision Making:

Systematic, structure and rational approaches to decision making, framed around logical arguments formed by accurate analysis. Efficient systems to gather, collate, succinctly present empirical and qualitative evidence for contract and program management.

The Review team extracted the following examples that the Program is making evidence-based decisions by incorporating the findings of MEL.

The degree to which MEL influences decisions made by the Governance Committee

There is some evidence that the Governance Committee utilises the MEL functions of the Program to inform their decisions. For example, evidence exists that the Governance Committee used monitoring data to make decisions about work plans (Governance Committee Meeting Minutes, 2022). Additionally, the Program's partnership approach promotes informed decision-making. For example, the PMT presents various risks and mitigation measures based on the Risk Register to the Governance Committee, which then collectively determines resolutions.



Program adaptation as a result of evidence from reporting

Key members within the Program used the Strategy Testing Workshop to enable all key stakeholders to reflect on the current design and adapt its MEL framework. The members considered the existing M&E data and the changing social, economic, and political landscapes in Solomon Islands when making these changes. As a result of the workshop, some modifications were made to the MEL framework. For example, the wording of some outcomes and indicators was amended for better alignment with the National Education Action Plan (NEAP) 2022-2026 and the ELF.

The degree to which the Program incorporates MEL systems into its operational processes

The Program uses an adaptive management approach, meaning it is constantly learning and adjusting its approach as needed. The MEL framework captures data from a variety of sources, including MEHRD's Results Framework, TA monthly reporting, PMT regular meetings, development partner and stakeholder meetings, and monitoring visits. The Program team is concerned about the practicality of the current MEL framework, which may have implications for MEHRD's ability to implement its own MEL framework (Review interviews).

The Program faces several challenges in collecting MEL data:

- Data gaps: MEHRD does not have any data available for 2020, 2021 or 2022 due to the shift from the old SIEMIS to the new SIEMIS. This has resulted in a data gap that makes it difficult for the Program to measure its progress and assess its effectiveness.
- Inconsistent data: Each division of MEHRD continues to maintain their own records or data on multiple spreadsheets. This results in inconsistent data that is not reliable and prone to human error.
- Lack of a centralised MEL system: MEHRD is working to set up a centralised MEL system, but in the meantime difficulties for the Program remain in accessing the data it needs to measure progress.
- Lack of MEL frameworks from service suppliers: Some of the service suppliers working with the Program do not have a MEL framework in place, making it difficult for the Program to measure the progress and impact of these projects.

The occurrence of regular reflection meetings

DFAT, MFAT and MEHRD reflected on program implementation through a variety of meetings, including:

- Mid-year and annual joint reviews, which assess progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Governance Committee meetings, which provide a forum for all stakeholders to discuss program implementation and make decisions about its future



- Bilateral engagements at the ministerial level and the Joint Policy Reform Group
- Monthly strategic meetings between DFAT, MFAT and MEHRD's Senior Management Team, which provide a valuable opportunity to discuss emerging issues.

Proportionality:

Business process, policies, and systems should be designed with a clear understanding of transaction costs, measured against the potential benefits.

Evidence of how the Program business processes consider MEHRD's systems and capabilities.

Because the Program is a partnership between SIG and development partners, it uses SIG systems to deliver the ESBS modality, which aims to give MEHRD greater ownership and accountability for its spending. However, this has posed some challenges, including:

- Long procurement and payment processes: SIG has a long procurement process, which can delay the delivery of activities.
- Slow implementation of SIG budget: The SIG budget is typically passed in April, but implementation does not begin until June which can lead to delays in spending.
- Funding model: MFAT and DFAT have different funding models. DFAT uses a reimbursement model, where MEHRD spends money on ESBS-funded activities and is then reimbursed by DFAT. This model can be challenging, as it relies on government cash flow and priorities. Meanwhile, MFAT provides advance payments for agreed expenditure. The different funding models may cause additional administrative complexity for MEHRD in managing and reporting on the respective partner contributions.
- Hiring freeze: The SIG hiring freeze has had an impact on the absorptive capacity of the Procurement Division, which is responsible for managing all Program related procurement.

Despite these challenges, the Program has made some progress in strengthening MEHRD's capacity to manage its finances and procurement processes. The Program also helped to increase spending on education, which is a key priority for SIG.

Performance and Risk Management:

Contracts, other investments, and programs must be continuously reviewed for quality to ensure that they are meeting their objectives and delivering maximum impact. Robust approaches to risk management. Integrity risk systems to prevent fraud.

Robust risk management and agile decision-making

The Program Risk Register provides a robust assessment and classification of the various types of risks and the corresponding mitigatory actions. In addition, risks and mitigations are discussed and actioned in the following ways:

- Discussing performance reporting during Governance Committee meetings (quarterly progress reports 2021, 2022)
- Amending contracts to reflect emerging needs such as procuring local TA during the pandemic to continue delivering Program activities (PMT interviews)

Governance Meetings and TA reports demonstrate evidence of discussion and agreement on system and process changes

While there has been no significant change made to the Program systems and modalities, the underspend of the ESBS modality is a concern of the Governance Committee. In response to this problem, the Governance Committee agreed to establish the Expenditure and Risk Management Sub-Committee to identify the ways to address this problem. As a result, recommendations were developed for consideration (Governance Committee Meeting Minutes, 2022).

Experimentation and Innovation:

Trialling of experimental and innovative mechanisms where there are reasonable grounds to expect better overall outcomes.

The design document for the Program identified that Performance Linked Aid has had varying levels of success in the past in Solomon Islands. While there was some evidence it had contributed to action on key policies and in increasing spending on basic education, it had also been criticised as potentially disempowering the local agency and being over-complicated in its design.

Considering this evidence the Performance Linked Aid modality under the Program was designed to ensure joint development of indicators between MEHRD and development partners, a simplified approach to annual identification of performance indicators that are aligned to MEHRD annual work plan, and joint monitoring through the Program Governance Committee.

The design of a joint governance approach to Performance Linked Aid provides some evidence of innovation and trying a new approach to a modality that is seen as having the potential to incentivise significant policy changes. As previously discussed, these changes have not created the right incentives for progress, which may merit separate exploration to understand why and draw lessons for future design.

Accountability and Transparency:

Partner accountable and demand transparency at all levels to facilitate honest dialogue about overall impact of investment.

The review team was made aware of an audit conducted in 2021 which accounted for the budgetary spend of various Program activities. As described in the Program Annual Reports



of 2022, 2023, MEHRD has taken pro-active steps in mitigating fraud and the reporting against the Program Risk Register identifies several mitigating actions such as:

- Reporting and investigation: If fraud is suspected, it is reported and investigated promptly by SIG/MEHRD. Information is shared with MFAT/DFAT.
- Fraud awareness training: All DT Global personnel contracted are provided with fraud awareness training. Regular refresher training is also provided.
- Fraud control plan: If fraud is suspected on PMT-managed program elements, the DT Global Fraud Control Plan is implemented. (Risk Register, 2022).

An independent compliance audit conducted in 2022 found no concerns in relation to mismanagement of funds, as MEHRD has strengthened their systems of fraudulent activity detection as part of their risk mitigation process (DT Global, 2023). An Asset Management Adviser is working to strengthen accountability systems, and a DFAT procurement compliance audit is conducted annually. The 2022 DFAT procurement compliance audit found that MEHRD was largely compliant with both SIG and DFAT procurement policies (DT Global, 2023).

2.3.4 What components/modalities of the program are creating the greatest impact and worth receiving more investment?

Given the lack of M&E data, it is not possible to do a quantitative analysis and then to identify what area of support has created the greatest impacts and is worth receiving more investment. However, drawing on the interviews with stakeholders, some areas that have created great impacts from their perceptions have been identified. These include:

Infrastructure. As infrastructure has been a long-standing gap in the Solomon Islands education sector, the Program's support in this area was highly appreciated by Review participants. They therefore expected additional funding to improve infrastructure, including classrooms, sanitation facilities, libraries, labs, and IT equipment. As access and quality are interrelated, lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities will hinder the quality of education.

Curriculum development and Professional development. The participants involved in curriculum development and professional development projects valued the Program's support in this area. While it is still early to see tangible impacts, stakeholders noted this support is highly needed given that the education curriculum has not been updated since 2014. They also stated that many teachers have not received professional training for a decade. MEHRD staff noted that the current Program funding for the educational resources as well as for teacher training has not met the needs of all schools across the country. Therefore, continued investment in teacher training and educational resources is important to enhance the capacity and skills of teachers and ensure access to relevant and updated curriculum materials.

Early Childhood Education. As ECE is considered the foundation of basic education and accessing ECE is a challenge, particularly for students from low-income families, some



participants believed that increasing funding for ECE programs can have a positive impact on student outcomes in the long term.

The Review findings suggest that investing in ESBS Infrastructure, curriculum development, professional development and Teachers in Training produced some positive results (this evidence is presented under the respective modality) and should therefore be considered when deciding to scale up or scale down the relative funding for these activities in the next phase of the Program.

As discussed in other parts of this report, efficiency of ESBS has been tied to the parallel support from the TA in specific areas to ensure MEHRD was able to advance the delivery of the annual work plan. Any increase in ESBS would therefore likely warrant an assessment of what TA may be necessary to ensure its delivery. Whether this is delivered through the current modality of a separate Capacity Development Fund or integrated into ESBS may be worth considering.

NGO grants are providing critical funding to advance GEDSI and safeguards in education as discussed previously. The minutes of the 2020 NGO Grant Selection Panel Meeting notes that there were several proposals that were highly rated but not considered for that round of grants. It mentions they could be referred to alternative avenues for potential support. This indicates there is likely scope to expand the NGO Grant modality and that capacity exists for delivering more in that area.

2.3.5 Is the funding from the various streams efficiently coordinated and delivered on the ground to education entities?

The Review found that the financial support from the various streams and donors is managed through MEHRD, but there is room for improvement in coordination between the various donor-funded aid programs to minimise the duplication of resources and activities. While the Solomon Islands Education Development Partners Coordination Group forum's primary function is currently information sharing, it is shifting to a greater focus on policy dialogue. This shift has strong potential to promote greater synergies between MEHRD's development partners, particularly towards the Program outcomes. Given MEHRD's resources are stretched and some positions in the Strategic Support Unit are vacant, it is a challenge for MEHRD to take the lead of the coordination function.

Another challenge is that many NGOs (except the Program NGO Grantees) have not engaged with MEHRD in their projects. Rather, they are working directly with schools or Provincial Education Authorities, and thus MEHRD is not always aware of what they are working on, where they are working, and how much funding has been allocated to the project. This suggests a need for Provincial Education Authorities to take a stronger role in overseeing aspects related to teacher and school management (such as adherence to regulations), which will be part of the ELF in time, and reporting to MEHRD.

Review participants also noted a challenge in coordination with SIG agencies. For example, Save the Children works with the Ministry of Environment on a school climate resilience program. A stronger relationship and collaboration between MEHRD and Ministry of



Environment could increase effectiveness of both programs, given that climate change and resilience to disasters are an important cross-cutting issue in the Program. Similarly, participants also highlighted an opportunity for strengthening the relationship between MEHRD and the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening in coordinating the Provincial Capacity Development Fund when it comes to school infrastructure projects. This will help reduce the duplication of infrastructure investments and may provide opportunities to utilise the technical expertise from the PCDF for the Program infrastructure projects.

2.4 Relevance

The overall Review findings suggested that the role and function of the Program remained relevant in the changing context and would remain relevant after the final year of funding of the Program. The Program was coherent with SIG and donor priorities. This section describes these findings in more detail. Suggestions are made to reconsider some aspects of the Program design considering which outcomes are within the remit of MEHRD as opposed to the Provincial Education Authorities.

2.4.1 To what extent do the program logic and outcomes remain relevant and achievable in the context of education reform and financing gaps after COVID 19?

Overall, the Program has met the needs of the education sector in Solomon Islands through its support in access, teaching and learning quality, and education management. The Review findings indicate that EOPOs 1-3 and most of the related intermediate outcomes articulated in the program logic remained relevant for the final year of the Program and beyond (during and after the implementation of the ELF). The wording of the intermediate outcomes sometimes amalgamates more than one outcome, which can make measurement more complicated. EOPO 4, though relevant, may need further reconsideration considering the ELF Outcomes and the remit of Education Authorities.

The relevance of each intermediate outcome is summarised below with recommendations on wording.

EOPO1: Improvement in basic education participation and completion

- 1.1 More school facilities aligned to greatest need with a focus on GEDSI. Relevant: While the intent of this outcomes remains relevant, the wording as it stands is too broad to form a meaningful measure. Defining ‘alignment to the greatest need’ would be beneficial. Key stakeholder/s: students, schools.
- 1.2 Increased availability of quality community based ECE. Somewhat relevant (may need revision alongside ELF outcomes): While this outcome is currently meeting the needs of children, parents, and communities, it doesn’t fully align to the current basic education focus of the Program. Key stakeholder/s: students, schools, NGOs, communities.



- 1.3 More learners complete basic education. Relevant: Through the ELF, and as identified in the NEAP 2022-26, increasing the number of learners remains strongly aligned to SIG priorities. Key stakeholder/s: students.
- 1.4 Cost of education is not a barrier to learners completing basic education. Relevant: The Program has supported MEHRD to develop the Education Funding Code (part of the ELF) and the Education School Fees Rules. There's still an opportunity to continue its support to MEHRD in socialising and implementing these regulations to remove financial barriers for students. Key stakeholder/s: students, schools, communities.

EOP02: Improved learning outcomes in basic education (literacy and numeracy)

- 2.1 Quality curriculum and aligned resources for basic education completed and in schools. Relevant. While it remains relevant and aligned to NEAP 2022-26, this intermediate outcome amalgamates two components that are difficult to accurately report on. The Review suggests separating the components into two separate outcomes:
 - 1) Quality curriculum complete and in schools
 - 2) Resources to support the basic education curriculum used in schools.Key stakeholder/s: students, schools, teachers, and school leaders
- 2.2 Teachers supported by School Leaders understand and use effective teaching strategies. Somewhat Relevant: This intermediate outcome may need revision alongside ELF outcomes as education management comes under the remit of the Education Authorities, which the Program or MEHRD currently has little control over. Key stakeholder/s: students, schools, teachers, and Provincial Education Authorities.

EOP03: Improved learning outcomes in basic education for disadvantaged children

- 3.1 Teachers and School Leaders have increased skills and knowledge about inclusive pedagogy. Relevant: As above, consider if this should be compartmentalised to progress with the ELF. Further, defining what 'inclusive pedagogy' looks like would be beneficial. Key stakeholder/s: students, schools, teachers and Provincial Education Authorities, NGOs.
- 3.2 Parents/communities actively support children's learning in basic education. Relevant (may need revision alongside ELF outcomes): If it is difficult to measure this outcome until the Education Authorities are better equipped to undertake MEL activities in the provinces, consider compartmentalising this until the ELF is enacted. The term 'actively support' is difficult to measure, a criterion for determining what this looks like may need to be developed. Key stakeholder/s: parents and caregivers, communities, NGOs, students.



EPO4: Improved sector management by Provincial Education Authorities and schools by MEHRD

- 4.1 Educational Authorities have organisational systems and skills to support effective teacher management. Relevant: As above, consider if this should be compartmentalised to progress alongside the implementation of the ELF.
- 4.2 Provincial Educational Authorities have the organisational structure and resources required to support quality teaching and learning for all.

Key stakeholder/s: Provincial Education Authorities.

- 4.3 MEHRD use SIG & A/NZ resources efficiently and effectively. Relevant: While MEHRD's performance is critical for the success of the Program, it may be worthwhile create a separate logic model for this operational aspect of the Program. This should call for visibility of the performance of each modality in detail. Key stakeholder/s: MEHRD, DFAT, MFAT.

Once the ELF outcomes are made, it is recommended to align the intermediate outcomes and the logic model against the ELF.

2.4.2 What is the Program's role in supporting the Education Legislative Framework?

The Program (or rather the partners within the program) have a key role in supporting the ELF to ensure the reform outcomes are sustainable. The ELF is guided by a White Paper and extensive consultations across the Education Sector. It is a long-term strategy that will require ongoing administration by MEHRD.¹⁰ It aims to improve the quality of education and includes provisions for strengthening the teaching profession by standardising issues related to human resources, teaching practices and career progression pathways (Interviews with legislation drafters).

The ELF aims to clarify stakeholder responsibilities, provide better coordination between different levels of education, and promote transparency and accountability. It formalises the leadership role of the Education Authorities in education management. This represents a prominent change for education providers, school boards, communities, schools, ECE centres, and teachers.

Further, MEHRD's coordination of the provinces will be strengthened, providing for the devolution of more decision-making powers to provincial authorities. This will also allow more functions to be addressed locally, such as resolving issues and complaints within the provinces and removing the need for teachers and/or parents to travel to Honiara. MEHRD will also be granted new regulatory enforcement powers to progress the intended results articulated in the ELF.

¹⁰ The Education Act is outdated and causes confusion about the roles and responsibilities of different education bodies.



The Review found that MEHRD has begun taking steps to support the implementation of the ELF. These include creating and implementing an ELF plan and adjusting the grants management system to improve the performance of education providers. MEHRD will make sure that Education Authorities carry out a self-assessment, have plans for improvement, and submit annual reports. The ELF plan will be updated to include a new policy for paying salaries and teacher employment conditions will also be developed to support Education Authorities with the impending changes (interviews with legislation drafters).

Going forward, the Program has a key role in supporting the implementation of the ELF. It will require MEHRD to refocus its role as functions are devolved, and EAs will need to develop their capabilities to deliver their new role. Some areas the Program could support include:

- developing MEL systems and activities to support the transition in educational service delivery and the associated responsibilities
- strengthening MEHRD's capability in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring
- budgeting for the costs of phased implementation
- raising awareness of the ELF and its roles and responsibilities across Education Authorities, education providers, and schools in each province
- building the capacity and capability of Education Authority staff and providing necessary infrastructure for Education Authorities to operate efficiently and address local needs
- supporting education providers that employ and manage teachers in teacher management
- undertaking a situational assessment to identify priorities, gaps, and areas the Program may support to meet the reform requirements.

2.4.3 Should the Program support ECE (given focus on basic education)?

The Review did not find sufficient evidence to make an assessment regarding the inclusion or segmentation of the ECE from the Program. However, the Review team recognises the importance of continuing ECE funding (regardless of the funding source) as it remains a key priority of MEHRD and relevant to the education reform.

Review participants held mixed views regarding whether ECE should be continued in the next phase. While it was generally agreed that ECE is an important step for children to move to basic education, some participants argued that it should not be continued in the next phase as the focus of the Program is on basic education and resources are limited. MEHRD staff noted that running ECE is very expensive as the teacher/student ratio is 1/10 compared to 1/35 for primary and secondary education. In addition, Governance Committee members noted the risk of duplication of ECE investments with UNICEF's regional programme for early childhood development. If ECE is going to be included in the Program, close coordination with UNICEF will be required to identify relative gaps and how each program can best work in parallel.

2.4.4 How coherent is the Program with the Education Strategic Framework (ESF) 2022-2026, Australia and New Zealand policy priorities, and the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacRef)?

At the international level, the Program contributes to the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The Program is also aligned with the development policy priorities of New Zealand and Australia in the education sector. Australia's development program has a longstanding objective of investing in education outcomes for children and youth in the Pacific region. Their investments are guided by the Pacific's Regional Education Framework (PacREF), which sets a shared reform agenda for education across the region until 2030.¹¹ Similarly, New Zealand's international development cooperation program focuses on access to quality education, equity, and inclusion. Its investments in education in the Pacific are also guided by PacREF. Both Australia and New Zealand have been long-standing and valued partners in education in Solomon Islands.

At the regional level, the program supports the key policy areas of PacREF: Quality and Relevance; Student Outcomes and Wellbeing; Teaching Profession. At the national level, the program is also aligned with the priority areas of the Solomon Islands National Education Action Plan (NEAP) for 2022-2026 such as Education System Management, Teacher Management, Financial Management, School Leadership and Management, Community Engagement, Access Strategies and Infrastructure, Curriculum Development, Professional Learning and Development, Student Assessment, and Teaching and Learning Resources.

2.5 GEDSI and Safeguarding

The Review findings indicated that the Program has been successful in promoting disability inclusion and inclusive practices in education, while providing grants to NGOs to support parental and community engagement. The Program also needs to ensure improved engagement and communication with the Education Authorities and schools to ensure the buildings meet the needs of the school.

2.5.1 How well is the current GEDSI and safeguarding approach aligned with the new Educational Legislative Framework?

It was difficult to assess the extent to which the approach to GEDSI and safeguarding within the Program was in alignment with the ELF because the details of new regulations and guidance were unavailable for review. In addition, while GEDSI and safeguarding issues were encouraged to be considered in infrastructure, curriculum and professional development, and NGO Grant projects, there has been no strategic approach to considering and addressing the GEDSI and safeguarding issues across the Program. Recently, the Program developed a GEDSI assessment tool to assist MEHRD on how to consider and adequately address GEDSI

¹¹ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/development-assistance/education>



throughout their work. However, the tool had yet to be finalised and implemented at the time of this Review and it is therefore not yet possible to assess its effectiveness.

Nevertheless, according to the GEDSI TA, the tool was designed to be aligned with the ELF and was designed to be inclusive and flexible enough to accommodate any other initiatives that may arise, especially in terms of administrative instructions from the ELF. It specifically focuses on operational aspects, internal management, and governance at different levels of education and complements the existing work of MEHRD by improving the inclusion of GEDSI in resource management, service delivery, and infrastructure development. They believed that the ELF would provide a broad framework that allows for the incorporation of such GEDSI initiatives.

In addition, Review participants who drafted the education reform legislation stated that the ELF will mandate GEDSI requirements to which all stakeholders need to comply. They also confirmed the Provincial Education Authorities and MEHRD will have a greater degree of responsibility in terms of ensuring the integration of GEDSI and safeguarding principles into the curriculum, professional development in schools, and increasing accountability on the ground.

To ensure effective implementation of the GEDSI tool in the Program upon the ELF passage, capacity building should be provided to MEHRD, Education Authorities, NGOs, and schools to carry out their functions with GEDSI included.

2.5.2 How have GEDSI and safeguard issues been considered and addressed in the planning and delivery of outputs/IPOs?

Overall, the Program made promising steps that reflect its commitment to consider and address GEDSI and safeguard issues in its planning and delivery of outputs and outcomes. Based on the interviews and document analysis, the Review team found that the Program took steps to promote social inclusion and indigenous pedagogy through the integration of these concepts in the curriculum and professional development materials. Positive discipline subjects encompassed social inclusion, while the value of vernacular languages was recognised and included in the curriculum, aligning with the United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022 to 2031). Teachers were encouraged to use local languages in their teaching practices, reflecting the importance of place-based or locally based education.

An inclusive education manual was incorporated into professional development training, equipping teachers with the ability to identify children with disabilities and refer them to specialised schools (DT Global, 2023; NGO interviews). Additionally, an online resource platform featuring educational videos catered to individuals with vision disabilities. Efforts were also made to train school leadership teams on inclusion, raising awareness about identifying students who are not attending school or living with disabilities. Gender issues were given priority in infrastructure projects, capacity development, and NGO grants, evident through initiatives such as dorms and ablution blocks for girls, and community/parent awareness raising activities to improve their knowledge about gender equity.



Child protection and safeguarding were also considered and addressed through NGO Grant projects and capacity development modality though there is still room to improve in this space. For example, World Vision Solomon Islands provided training, workshops, and materials to schools, parents, and caregivers to improve their knowledge about disability inclusion, child protection and gender equality. The Program also delivered training on Child protection, sexual harassment, and abuse, to an NGO Grantee (DT Global 2022).

Despite this progress, some areas warrant a greater level of focus. Climate change, and other environmental risks, such as droughts, tsunamis, and sea level rise were not sufficiently considered in the design and implementation of activities. In terms of child protection, according to the Enabling Factors Analysis Report 2023, MEHRD has not developed any formal systems so far to capture information on students who, for some reasons drop out of school. This finding is also consistent with similar commentary found in the Program Governance Committee meeting minutes. The Program is aware of this and is developing an Environmental and Social Management Framework that is in line with MFAT and DFAT's safeguarding policies and aims to address these safeguarding issues.

While the Program made efforts to involve Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs in the development of the GEDSI tool, they were under-resourced to participate in this development process. This raised a need for considering allocating budgets to enable the participation of key partners in this space.

2.5.3 To what extent do the interventions that address GEDSI and safeguarding issues meet the needs of the target program groups (e.g., girls and disadvantaged students)?

As discussed earlier, the Program addressed GEDSI and safeguarding issues through various interventions such as infrastructure improvements, curriculum materials, and professional development. Interviews conducted with girls and disadvantaged students, including those with hearing disabilities, indicated their general satisfaction with the Program's support, such as providing dorms and ablution blocks for girls, sign language handbooks, and training. These initiatives have contributed to improving their access to education. However, there are still challenges that hinder the Program and MEHRD from achieving inclusive education, particularly equitable access for all. The Review team was informed of the interest in understanding the barriers to inclusive education access and how the Program can contribute to improving the access. The following subsection aims to address this.

2.5.4 What are the key barriers to inclusive education access, and how can the Program improve access?

The document review and interviews with diverse stakeholders identified several barriers to inclusive education access, which can be categorized into five groups:

Physical barriers: Poor-quality roads and lack of transportation in rural areas, inaccessible school buildings and facilities, and a shortage of specialised education schools (only six in the country) make it difficult for many students to access education. Some schools in rural and



remote areas mentioned that their students have to walk for hours to reach school, and during rainy days, the schools become inaccessible due to muddy roads. The current building designs in schools visited by the review team were not suitable for children with physical disabilities. This is a system-wide problem in all schools in the Solomon Islands, as noted by GEDSI consultants. Currently, accommodating students with disabilities relies on the willingness and support of schools, families, and classmates. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the Program to assist MEHRD in developing inclusive building codes and improving building designs in future infrastructure projects. Additionally, advocating to other stakeholders such as MPGIS, provincial governments, donors, and NGOs to invest in local infrastructure like roads leading to schools is essential.

Financial barriers: School fees pose a significant obstacle for many families in sending their children to school. The new School Free Rules can help overcome this financial barrier. Therefore, the Program has an opportunity to support the implementation of this policy by conducting workshops to raise awareness among schools about these new rules.

Social barriers: Stereotypes and stigma make parents less likely to send their disabled children, especially girls, to school. There is a prevailing attitude that parents prioritize investing in boys' education over girls', while disability is often viewed as a punishment or source of shame. These beliefs lead many to keep their children at home. Community attitudes and lack of knowledge about GEDSI also contribute to the exclusion of girls and children with disabilities from social participation and education. Current interventions, such as community and parent awareness-raising activities in NGO Grant projects and GEDSI-focused professional development for schools, have proven effective in addressing these social barriers. The Program support to implement the GEDSI toolkit across all aspects of the Program and MEHRD's functions is needed to promote strategic consideration and addressing these social barriers and other GEDSI challenges.

Human barriers: There is a general lack of GEDSI awareness among MEHRD staff and schools. While the GEDSI Situational Analysis Report revealed that many MEHRD staff possess knowledge in this area, GEDSI consultants noted they faced challenges in addressing GEDSI issues. Teachers also lack the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of girls and children with disabilities. However, on a positive note, the GEDSI consultants observed that most of the schoolteachers they spoke to are very interested in improving their knowledge of GEDSI to enhance inclusivity in their teaching and management. This presents an opportunity for the Program to provide capacity-building in GEDSI for schools and ensures the high intake of the schools in this training. Additionally, there is a shortage of teachers who can teach sign language and work with children with disabilities throughout the country. Addressing this lack of specialized teachers should be considered in the next phase. Another barrier is the absence of data on disadvantaged students in MEHRD, hindering their understanding of the scope of GEDSI issues and allocation of adequate resources to address them.

Political barriers: The lack of policies, guidelines, and tools to enable MEHRD staff and schools to address GEDSI issues is a major challenge. It should also be noted that alternate curriculums to accommodate diverse needs from children with various disabilities (e.g. vision, hearing, and cognitive disabilities) remain a gap in the education sector. Although a national disability and inclusive education policy has been drafted, it is yet to be endorsed. The GEDSI



consultants emphasised the need to develop a set of minimum standards to measure GEDSI progress against MEHRD's annual work plan and the NEAP. The Program thus can play a role in bridging this gap through its capacity development modality. Additionally, the Year 6 examination was identified as a "high stakes" exam that places undue pressure on students and teachers, acting as a barrier to educational progression. The Program has already contributed to removing this exam barrier, which has increased access and transition from Year 6 to Year 7. However, teachers expressed concerns about a reduction in student performance. Therefore, it is necessary for the Program to further investigate the impacts of this change and address any associated problems.

By addressing these barriers, the Program can enhance inclusive education access and contribute to the removal of barriers that hinder equitable educational opportunities for all.

2.6 Learning

The Review found that the Program used an adaptive management technique which enabled it to acquire enough data to report on its performance and progress, despite the existing quantitative data deficiencies. Furthermore, the performance results were effectively disseminated to stakeholders and were utilised in planning and budgeting, and to inform amendments to the Program's operations.

Despite having challenges with timely and accurate data collection at an intermediate outcome level, as evidenced by the Quarterly Reports and the Annual Reports, the Program actively monitors progress against outcome activities (the activity-based outputs) and budgetary spend. The Review team noted that the following specific actions which are indicators of program learning:

- Monitoring the high-risk issues in the Risk Register and reporting contingency plans (DT Global, 2023)
- Noting Governance Committee recommendations and periodically reporting against the actions taken
- Conducting performance reviews of international and local Technical Assistants and providing recommendations for improvement
- Conducting evaluations of teacher professional development programs
- Developing frameworks before commencing activities – for example, the MEL Framework, the Capacity Development tool, and framework, the GEDSI assessment framework
- Conducting Strategy Testing workshops to review the relevance and purpose of the Program design
- Evaluating the performance of the Program Management Team via a stakeholder rating Rubric



2.6.1 How effective are the processes that are used for measuring and assessing program performance (i.e. MEL framework and tools, progress reports, strategy testing workshops, PLA reports)?

Overall, the tools and processors used by the Program aided the program to make timely decisions, despite facing several challenges due to the lack of data. The lack of access to data such as student, teacher, and school information was identified as the greatest risk facing the Program MEL. The recent Program support for the implementation of the new SIEMIS will help to fill the data gap. Review participants also stated that, while there is still much to be done to enhance the quality of data at the provincial and school levels, considerable progress has been made in linking the planning and reporting systems.

Given the substantial gaps in the availability and quality of quantitative data, the Program adopted an approach to monitoring that relies on regular and transparent feedback loops to gather evidence for collective learning. Implementing this learning and adaptive management approach, the program has been successful in utilising a range of tools and processes to collect evidence that contributes to measuring outcomes and providing guidance for the program. These tools and processes include capturing data from MEHRD's Results Framework, TA monthly reporting, PMT regular meetings, development partner and stakeholder meetings, monitoring visits to project sites under NGO Grant, Stories of Change, SMT monitoring, and joint reviews with education authorities and PMT performance surveys. Of these, Stories of Change were highly valued by some participants as it offers a comprehensive view of the effects of the Program's support and progress towards EOPOs. To ensure sustainability, the PMT is planning to work with MEHRD to develop capacity to disseminate information on positive changes in education and encourage stakeholders to drive change.

The risk register was highly valued as an effective tool for monitoring and managing program risks. It also assigns responsibility for implementing controls and risk mitigation treatments, as well as providing for regular review and updates.

The Review found that the PMT effectively used the evidence gathered to draw conclusions, generate insights, and share them with stakeholders. By engaging in collective reflection, the PMT was able to assess the program's assumptions and approaches and determine the extent to which they are still relevant and valid.

2.6.2 How well are the learnings from these activities integrated into annual program planning, budget allocation, and adjustments?

The Review found that the learnings from the activities described above have been effectively used to inform annual program planning, and to guide adjustments to program delivery. A Strategy Testing workshop and Governance Committee meetings were identified as beneficial



platforms for incorporating the learnings into planning, budgeting, and adjustments.¹² The PMT conducted a Strategy Testing workshop with MEHRD, Technical Assistants, DFAT and MFAT in 2022 and 2023 to use the learnings to support program development, planning and reporting. As a result, several changes were proposed collectively to refine the program direction in line with the current education context of Solomon Islands. Similarly, the PMT has shared learnings and identified any potential program risks through fortnightly engagement with partners and through TA briefings, thus helping to address delays and underspends within the program.

¹² Strategy Testing is a developmental evaluation approach where regular reflection and contextual assessment helps to refine the program management and implementation, and to provide regular opportunities for continuous learning and adaptation.

3. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the Review has identified recommendations for the future of the Program. Where possible, some of the recommendations can commence during the final months of this phase, noting that they would likely need to continue into a future phase. Other recommendations focus on considerations for the design of any future Program. These are presented below.

Recommendations that can, where possible, commence in the current phase

1. In preparation for passage of the Education Bill and implementation of the ELF, the Program should support MEHRD to undertake a sector and organisational review of current versus future accountabilities. This can commence in the final six months of the Program but will likely need to continue into any new Program.
2. The Program should increase its focus on GEDSI and safeguarding. In the final months of the Program, this could include providing specialist TA to support MEHRD to progress the implementation of the GEDSI tool and prepare for ELF implementation. In any future iterations of the Program, this could include support to MEHRD to strengthen engagement with other SIG agencies in this space (e.g. Ministry for Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology).
3. The Program should support MEHRD to develop more strategic approaches to school infrastructure data management and prioritisation that aligns with long-term SIEMIS plans. While this is likely to be long-term work, it should be prioritised so that better data can inform planning and decision-making.
4. As MEHRD's role in policy formulation and system monitoring under the ELF requires increased sector co-ordination, including co-ordination within Solomon Islands education entities and with development partners, the Program should continue to support MEHRD and MFAT's role as EDPCG co-chairs. Provision of local TA to MEHRD's Strategic Services Division can help bolster the capacity of MEHRD in executing its development partner co-ordination functions.
5. The Program should support MEHRD to develop a transparent and equitable process for selecting school-based infrastructure projects and examine environmental risks (related to geographic location) prior to authorising building. This should also include developing a process for confirming commitments to asset maintenance and local buy-in with schools and setting explicit expectations (e.g. through a Memorandum of Understanding).

Consideration for the design of any future Program

1. The design of any future Program should be aligned to the future accountabilities in the ELF. While MEHRD should remain the main Program partner, the design should consider how to support EAs and schools to meet their new accountabilities.
2. The design of any future Program should work with MEHRD and other development partners to confirm what other sector support is planned. If, through the design process, it is confirmed that UNICEF will continue to support ECE, the Program should maintain its primary focus on basic education.



3. The EOPOs of any future design should be calibrated to the length of the programme so their achievement is realistic within the timeframe of the Program. The changes in education system management that are embedded in the ELF are likely to lead to a period of transition for the Solomon Islands education system. Careful identification of EOPOs is therefore important to recognise the context and the opportunity to align the EOPOs with the ELF.
4. The Program should support MEHRD to develop its sector performance monitoring function under the ELF. This includes setting performance indicators, measures, and targets to assess the effectiveness of the ELF and any interventions that are delivered.
5. If a future design of the Program continues to include delivery of large projects (e.g. infrastructure), it should consider the best modalities for these investments. If the selected modality continues to be delivered through ESBS, the Program should consider funding specialist capacity in MEHRD or back-filling existing roles to ensure that core business as usual activity is not compromised. Increased support for coordination with the Ministry of Finance and Trade (MOFT) and the Ministry of Public Services should also be considered to ensure there are no delays in accessing funds through MOFT systems and SIG recruitment processes.
6. DFAT and MFAT should consider how they can streamline funding modalities to minimise the administrative burden on MEHRD's administration of funding. This could include a Delegated Funding Agreement to channel the funding through a single mechanism. A longer-term funding plan would also help to provide SIG and other Program partners with visibility for longer-term planning.
7. If NGO grant funding continues to be a modality for delivery of the Program, consideration should be given to the selection requirements to increase accessibility for local NGOs and CSOs. Directing the funding through SIG systems (e.g. through the ESBS), with appropriate TA support and PMT oversight, would increase ownership of the NGO grant by MEHRD and enable use of SIG due diligence requirements.



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