

Education Pathways to Peace in Mindanao Mid Term Review

The Education Pathways to Peace in Mindanao (Pathways) program is Australia's bilateral education investment in the Philippines. It is supporting the delivery and improvements to the quality early grades education in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), a newly constituted self-governing region in southern Philippines. Pathways is a AUD90 million investment designed to be implemented over nine years (2017 to 2026).

The Pathways program is delivered in partnership with the regional Bangsamoro Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) and the national Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) through managing contractor Palladium International Pty Ltd, and in consortium with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Orient Integrated Development Consultants Inc (OIDCI). It focuses on strengthening education policies and institutions, ensuring accessible and integrated education system and curriculum, addressing inequality and disparity in education programming, and improving teacher quality, formalising the Islamic education system for improving kindergarten to Grade 3 education in the BARMM. Pathways was designed to undertake a flexible, adaptive, and responsive implementation approach in responding to these priorities.

An independent program review of Pathways was commissioned from July to December 2022 to assess Pathways' progress in delivering its intended outcomes. The midterm review documented achievements and successes of the Pathways five years into implementation, and identified recommendations to improve gaps and weak points in programming and operations. This included assessing how the program responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of Management Response

The midterm review recommendations relate to longer term approaches to the delivery and governance of the program. While most of the recommendations will require strategic planning and can be operationalised through the recalibration of Pathways program management and annual work planning processes, some recommendations are already being addressed and implemented by DFAT, Palladium, and the Pathways Program Management Office.

DFAT welcomes the midterm review findings and agrees with majority of the recommendations proposed in the report. In response to these recommendations, DFAT agrees to:

- Continue the program until 2026, prioritising support in expanding early grades (K-3) education access in disadvantaged communities, strengthening gender equality and disability inclusion, and improving education data management
- Consider and adopt the specific strategic, programmatic, and operational recommendations from this evaluation
- Update the program's monitoring and evaluation system with focus on identifying better performance indicators, select updates to the theory of change and resulting improvements in reporting against the intermediate outcomes and analysis of contributions to achieving the end of program outcomes
- Lead enhanced education policy dialogue and ensure effective coordination of oversight arrangements for Pathways with key Philippine government counterparts especially DepEd and MBHTE

DFAT Management Response to the Mid Term Review Recommendations

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Actions	Timeframe
<p><i>Recommendation 1:</i></p> <p><i>The program should continue through to 2026.</i></p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>The midterm review found the Pathways program to be highly valued by its stakeholders and remains relevant as it is able to deliver strong achievements most notably in improving access to education services in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and systems strengthening within the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DFAT will continue the Pathways program through to 2026 with select refinements. It will focus on improving access to education in disadvantaged communities, formalising madrasah (Islamic) education, strengthening gender equality and disability inclusion, and improving education data management. Success will entail reducing the scale and number of proposed implementation sites (i.e., public schools, community learning centres, madrasahs) for a more targeted approach. - DFAT will work with the managing contractor, Palladium, in implementing the review recommendations to address identified shortcomings of the program, including in monitoring and evaluation, communication, public diplomacy and gender equality. 	<p>July 2023</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 2:</i></p> <p><i>DFAT to invest in ensuring that oversight arrangements are more meaningful and functional.</i></p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Enhanced strategic oversight and DFAT's direct engagement with counterparts, particularly the national Department of Education (DepEd) would improve communications, relationships, and public diplomacy, as well as improve coherence and connection with national education priorities and approaches.</p> <p>In terms of day-to-day program management, DFAT and Pathways Program Management Office (PMO) have reverted to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DFAT will lead regular policy dialogues for Pathways and other Australian education investments in the Philippines with DepEd. The Pathways PMO will need to collect and share more suitable evidence, data, and briefing to enable DFAT to lead on this process in a way that is useful for stakeholders including DepEd and the BARMM MBHTE. - DFAT (as co-Chair of DepEd and MBHTE) and the Pathways program management office 	<p>Commencing August 2023</p>

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		fortnightly management meetings for a more regular and targeted updating and coordination about the program. The technical aspect of the monthly management dashboard report will be tailored to serve as reference in DFAT-DepEd policy dialogues.	(as Secretariat) will ensure the Program Steering Committee is valuable to all members and meets regularly every six months to make high-level program decisions. At least annually the Committee will consider an analysis (strategy testing) of progress against Pathways' program logic, supported by an analysis from the Secretariat.	
<p><i>Recommendation 3-7:</i></p> <p><i>Leave Intermediate Outcomes¹ 1-4 unchanged and revise Intermediate Outcome 5² to focus on MBHTE as the principal partner.</i></p>	Agree	<p>The Review found that the end of program outcomes (EOPOs) are too ambitious given the context, including the pandemic and the consolidation of education governance in the BARMM. The program's intermediate outcomes remain relevant and could well be achieved within the program's timeframe, although Intermediate Outcome 5 needs to be updated. The program's program logic will be maintained but should be supplemented with an updated monitoring, evaluation, accountability, research and learning (MEARL) framework for assessing program performance, with the EOPOs remaining relevant at the goal level.</p> <p>DFAT agrees with the recommendation to retain Intermediate Outcome 1 to 4 unchanged. DFAT also agrees that the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DFAT agrees with the proposed rearticulation of Intermediate Outcome 5 to focus on strengthening the capacity of MBHTE in education governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "MBHTE effectively performing its planning, delivery, and oversight responsibilities" - <i>See actions in response to recommendation 10 below as regard adjustments to program MEARL and program logic.</i> 	May – August 2023

¹ Intermediate Outcome 1: K-3 educators deliver integrated, inclusive, contextualised and peace promoting curriculum;
Intermediate Outcome 2: Improved quality, effectiveness, and management of K-3 teachers;
Intermediate Outcome 3: More children access and participate in contextualised K-3 education;
Intermediate Outcome 4: Parents and communities contribute to reform and development of the education system

² Intermediate Outcome 5: Institutions are better at collaboratively formulating, implementing, and monitoring inclusive policies

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		<p>current Intermediate Outcome 5 is too ambitious in broadly referring to institutional reform. Institutional reform takes significant time to establish and take effect. It would be difficult to achieve this within the nine-year timeframe of the Pathways program, considering the major changes to the socio-political context of the BARMM in the last five years, including compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education systems.</p>		
<p><i>Recommendation 8:</i></p> <p><i>Provide direct and targeted support to 'operational level' financial systems operations in MBHTE.</i></p> <p><i>Introduce financial advice to e.g. procurement systems, basic financial management procedures, and improved paper flow processes.</i></p>	<p>Agree in part</p>	<p>DFAT acknowledges the broad organisational development needs of the MBHTE, and that reforms will take time and careful sequencing. MBHTE's organisational structure is progressively developing towards clearer allocation of responsibilities and functions. DFAT is of the view that the structure needs to be bedded down before further public financial management support could be delivered.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DFAT will request that Palladium strengthen its support for MBHTE's budget preparation, execution and budget consultations which are key to sustaining Pathways programmatic priorities using the BARMM government's own resources. DFAT will not invest further in improving the Ministry's overall procurement and financial management systems and processes through the Pathways program. 	<p>October 2023</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 9:</i></p> <p><i>Significantly enhance gender analysis, investment, and reporting.</i></p> <p><i>Redouble emphasis on gender and identify</i></p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Evidence for Pathways' support to gender equality and women empowerment is less clear than for social and disability inclusion. DFAT agrees that the program should seek to better integrate gender analysis and planning and strengthen its evidence of results from targeting gender outcomes and mainstreaming gender. Gender equality and women's empowerment in the BARMM is a</p>	<p>DFAT will task Palladium to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop guidance to implement gender analysis and assessment in in the scoping, design, planning, adapting, and reporting of Pathways activities - incorporate more concrete outcome indicators in its inclusion strategy and its response to issues of inclusion and 	<p>August-December 2023</p>

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<i>gender success stories within existing streams of work</i>		transitional process, and Pathways' ambitions should focus on alternative, practical and sustainable change. Pathways' revised monitoring and evaluation system should incorporate appropriate measurement to provide greater evidence that demonstrates the scope and nature of progress against program outcomes.	marginalisation, especially in gender in the updated Pathways monitoring and evaluation system.	
<p><i>Recommendation 10:</i></p> <p><i>Significantly increase emphasis on monitoring, reporting, public diplomacy, and telling the strategic story.</i></p> <p><i>Understand and appreciate DFAT and DepEd needs more thoroughly.</i></p> <p><i>Implement recommendations of the Evaluability Assessment³</i></p>	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees that Pathways should update its overall performance assessment framework to ensure information gathered about program progress is clear, coherent, and can support the PSC to make evidence-based strategic decisions.</p> <p>The Pathways PMO needs to provide verifiable reports supported by evidence that document how the program is progressing higher level outcomes to fulfil the Philippines and Australian government accountability mechanisms.</p> <p>More broadly, the program's achievements should be sufficiently communicated to the program's stakeholders to ensure greater transparency and appreciation of the Australia-Philippines support to the BARMM.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DFAT will request that Palladium update the program's monitoring and evaluation framework according to the Evaluability Assessment recommendations and in line with the updated DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standards. DFAT will closely monitor improvements in the Pathways' monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that it will better address reporting against the intermediate outcomes and analysis of contributions to achieving end of program outcomes, including developing more concrete indicators for gender equality mainstreaming. - The Pathways program management office will update its Communications Strategy (and delivery) to strengthen both public diplomacy and communications aspects of the program. - The Pathways program management office will disseminate Pathways knowledge 	<p>May – September 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p> <p>October 2023</p>

³ A readiness assessment of Pathways' monitoring, evaluation, accountability, research, and learning (MEARL) system initiated by Palladium to inform how the system can be improved to meet the program's needs

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			<p>products to maximize the value of its research and monitoring and evaluation findings to inform broader initiatives undertaken by the MBHTE and education policy reforms at the national level (e.g., by Department of Education, and the Second Congressional Commission on Education⁴).</p>	
<p><i>Recommendation 11:</i></p> <p><i>Restructure and reconfigure the team to mirror Directorate Generals in MBHTE.</i></p> <p><i>Positions and skill sets to be reconsidered.</i></p> <p><i>Introduce annual 360-degree reporting.</i></p>	<p>Agree in Part</p>	<p>DFAT agrees that the current structure of the program team should be carefully assessed to determine the most effective deployment of human resources and technical skillsets to adequately manage the program scope for Pathways. The current Pathways program management structure has advisers assigned to lead coordination specifically with MBHTE’s Policy and Planning unit, Directorate for Madrasah Education, and the Directorate of Basic Education. There would be little gained from consolidating roles to just one lead adviser, given that Pathways advisers have established good working relationships with the unit heads and the Director Generals for Basic Education and Madrasah Education. DFAT supports instituting a regular feedback mechanism to better monitor performance of program advisers and support provided to MBHTE.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palladium will increase the diversity of Pathways PMO staff with appropriate contextual and technical knowledge and will review how the Pathways senior management being based alternately between Manila and Cotabato City can be better aligned to balance liaison with both the BARMM counterparts and national government agencies (i.e. DepEd and NEDA). - Program Management Office staffing and advisers will be reconsidered vis-à-vis the shortlist of priority areas, where the program has progressed relatively well thus far. - Palladium will strengthen its adviser performance appraisal system to amplify MBHTE’s contribution to adviser feedback and the final assessment. 	<p>Commencing August 2023</p>

⁴ A national commission mandated to conduct a comprehensive review of the Philippine education sector and serves as an avenue for stakeholders including industry partners and Australia to recommend transformative, concrete, and targeted reforms to improve the global competitiveness of Philippine education and labour markets