

## MFAT Management Response

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### Evaluation team members

Members of the evaluation team, contracted by Plan International, were:

Name	Role
MA Kieu Thi Bich Thuy	Co team leader
Dr Luong Minh Phuong	Principal consultant and co-team leader
Assoc Prof Dr Nguyen Thi My Trinh	Consultant
MS Vu Huyen Trinh	Consultant
MD Nguyen Tien Dung	Consultant

### Key findings/conclusions of the evaluation

Please note that this document assumes that the reader has a basic knowledge of the project, its objectives, and implementation model.

The reviewers were asked to assess the project with regard to performance, relevance and sustainability.

#### **1. Performance**

Overall, the review found that the project was performing well in terms of producing good development results.

However, delays in construction, delays in replication of project approach into non-project areas, and a lack of ownership at the provincial level all needed to be addressed.

A number of specific recommendations were made with the aim of improving implementation, such as the need for greater inter-school learning by beneficiaries.

An extension of the project timeframe was also recommended to help manage these issues.

The key findings and recommendations are listed here (emphasis added):

- **Finding:** "The project **achieved the outputs and results as planned** at a quite good level, particularly those of capacity

building of all four components, after three years of implementation.”

- Finding: “**Some project activities have been delayed** and need to be accelerated in order to minimize the negative effects of the project on outcomes/results, specifically, the **construction** of school infrastructures and facilities, the provision of equipment and play toys for preschools, **replication** of community groups to out-of-the project sites, the establishment of **ECCD network** at the provincial level.”
- Finding: “With the existing progress, it is foreseen that **the project may hardly complete** some project activities and secure the quality of some planned result indicators.”
- Finding: “The **project management has effectively conducted at the grassroots level** (specifically, commune and village levels) despite [lack of] its great improvements at the provincial level.’
- General recommendation: “The practicing activities should be strengthened in order to change behaviours of the project stakeholders.” (Comment: this is about ensuring training is practical and actually results in behaviour change. This is covered in more detail below).
- General recommendation: “The remaining project duration needs to properly be considered so as to achieve the planned interventions and objectives.”
- Specific recommendations: See Appendix A attached. Particular ones to note are No.1,2,3 (finding ways to draw in the PPC and boost provincial-level ownership); No. 4 (filling vacant positions); No. 6,17,18 (boosting inter-school learning) No. 15, 11 (greater balance of support to commune level “core groups”); Nos 7, 8 (resolving procurement delays).

## **2. Relevance**

The review found that project remained highly relevant to the needs of Gia Lai’s people and with the objectives of Gia Lai (Education for All, National Targeted Programme in Education) as well as with Plan International’s focus on child centred development.

The key finding is listed here (emphasis added):

- Finding: “The project activities and achieved results/outcomes are assessed to be of **high relevance** though their

sustainabilities need to be further enhanced in the coming time.” (Comment: see next point regarding sustainability).

### **3. Sustainability**

The review found that good progress had been made in some aspects of sustainability, including the strategy of delivering the project through DOET’s own staff and existing training mechanisms, the work to help communities fundraise for their own pre-schools and contribute, in kind, to construction.

Positively, the project has produced an adapted preschool curriculum that better suited ethnic minority communities and was being rolled out in other provinces by Viet Nam’s Women’s Union.

However, more work was needed over a number of fronts, most especially a greater level of ownership by the PPC to bring together the roles of different departments (e.g. health), to direct DOET to solve problems, to ‘own the successes’, and to later make investment decisions that will see the benefits of the project sustained and replicated into the future.

The key findings and recommendations are listed here (emphasis added):

- Finding: “The roles of **Provincial People’s Committee** in the monitoring and evaluation should be strongly promoted so that the unexpected problems could timely be solved during the project implementation. Importantly, the **ownership, autonomy and responsibilities** of concerned stakeholders need to be further strengthened in the coming time. These are seen as the decisive factors of the fulfilment of the project expected results and **sustainability**.”
- General recommendation: “A roadmap of consolidating, improving the quality of and replicating the achieved project results needs to be developed.”

- Specific recommendations: See Appendix A attached. Particular ones to note are No.1,2,3 (finding ways to draw in the PPC and boost provincial level ownership); No. 10 (continue to ensure project is part of wider DOET planning and budgeting); No. 19, 20 (increasing focus on risk management through sustainability plan).

## Lessons for MFAT

Lessons that MFAT can take from the evaluation are:

No.	Lesson	Programme response
1	<p><b>Political support</b> Active political support from the PPC is critical for project success in Viet Nam (as opposed to <i>passive</i> political support, which is what we've had).</p>	<p>At the design stage, Gia Lai insisted that there would be no project steering committee drawing in New Zealand Aid Programme, PPC and Plan. Instead DOET runs its own project management board, and the PPC is not represented. We probably should have insisted on a traditional project steering committee whereby both NZ Aid Programme and PPC were represented. This works well in other projects we have in Viet Nam, and enables the PPC to take an oversight role and to direct their departments to solve problems and be accountable for their work.</p> <p>In 2016 we have been rebuilding the relationship with the PPC in order to get them to actively support the project and to help solve problems. This is covered in more detail in the next section.</p>

No.	Lesson	Programme response
2	<p><b>Accountability</b></p> <p>At the design stage, it probably made sense to split funding between DOET (to encourage ownership) and Plan International (to provide some oversight and programme management expertise). But in practice Plan is not really responsible for DOET's actions, meaning that their incentive to sort out issues is lacking. The two parties have not always worked well together, and so too much responsibility comes back to Embassy as peacemaker, making this project very difficult to manage.</p>	<p>Given the known risk of delay when dealing with Gia Lai, it may have been better to grant all the funding to Plan International who in turn could have sub-granted funds to DOET, and potentially managed all the procurement themselves. The risk of a lower sense of ownership would have been more-than-offset by the gains in accountability from both Plan and DOET in a line through to NZAP, plus the reduced management overhead by the Embassy.</p> <p>There is no easy fix for this issue in 2016, other than the active management which we have been undertaking with regard to both the procurement and the next steps following the midterm review.</p>
3	<p><b>Complexity</b></p> <p>The project design is far too complex. For example, there are over a dozen different management and implementation teams covering provincial/district/commune level. The design's theory of change and explanation of who exactly is responsible for what is just too confusing, and various terms are used interchangeably throughout. This complexity, combined with imprecise writing, has helped to generate many of the management issues we have faced, and made their resolution by successive members of staff (and by the reviewers) all the more difficult.</p>	<p>NZ Aid Programme must ensure all designs are written in plain English, with a clear theory of change and implementation model.</p>

## Recommendations for MFAT

No.	Key Recommendation	Programme response
	<p><u>Performance recommendations</u></p> <p>General recommendation 2: The practicing activities should be strengthened in order to change behaviours of the project stakeholders.</p> <p>General recommendation 3: The remaining project duration needs to properly be considered so as to achieve the planned interventions and objectives</p>	<p><u>Performance recommendations</u></p> <p>Partially agreed. This recommendation is essentially about ensuring project beneficiaries (i.e. parents, preschool teachers, primary teachers, and school managers) move from just “knowing” to actually “doing”.</p> <p>While the analysis is deemed correct, the project stakeholders (including MFAT) are less pessimistic about the outlook for behaviour change – on the basis of the positive outcomes for children’s educational achievement already achieved, plus the examples of changes in teacher practice that arose during the Longitudinal Study.</p> <p>MFAT takes the view that this should be addressed as part of the wider suite of performance improvements suggested by the review</p> <p><u>Response to specific recommendations:</u></p> <p>No.1,2,3 (finding ways to draw in the PPC and boost provincial level ownership);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Regarding provincial ownership, see next section.</li> </ul> <p>No. 4 (filling vacant positions);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>Plan International</u> to ensure all project staffing positions are filled. (Note that since the review, all six positions in Gia Lai were filled but as of June 2016, a new Education Specialist is due to be recruited. Plan has also committed to move resources internally to better support construction and procurement). <b>Completed (3/17)</b></li> </ul> <p>No. 6,17,18 (boosting inter-school learning) points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>Plan International</u> to show evidence of greater emphasis on in-service training in Y5 and Y6 work plans. This is so beneficiaries actually apply new techniques rather than simply learn about them (this includes getting parents into pre-schools). <b>Completed, agreed for Year 5 Workplan 31 July 2016 (3/17)</b></li> </ul> <p>No. 15, 11 (greater balance of support to commune level “core groups”);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>Plan International</u> to show evidence of improved inter-school learning opportunities and support to the commune level “core groups” in the Y5 and Y6 work plans. <b>Completed, agreed for Year 5 Workplan 31 July 2016 (3/17)</b></li> </ul> <p>No. 7, 8, 9 (resolving procurement delays, following procurement rules).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>Plan International and DOET</u> to provide MFAT with required procurement updates by the end of July 2016 (refer letter attached Appendix B). This will be required before MFAT releases the next tranche of funding to DOET. <b>Completed in August 2016, but there have been more delays since (3/17)</b></li> </ul> <p>Agreed. Embassy has agreed, in principle, to a no-cost extension to the project beyond its current end date of March 2017 – subject to resolution of the remaining procurement matters, the agreement of a satisfactory sustainability roadmap (as set out under recommendation 1), and New Zealand’s approval of the Year 5 Work plan (refer letter attached Appendix B). <b>Conditions met in September 2016 (3/17)</b></p>

No.	Key Recommendation	Programme response
	<p><u>Sustainability recommendations</u></p> <p>General recommendation 1. A roadmap of consolidating, improving the quality of and replicating the achieved project results needs to be developed</p>	<p><u>Sustainability recommendations</u></p> <p>Agreed. While the project already has substantial sustainability elements built in (including a replication strategy which rolls out the approach to an additional ~30 non-porect communes in the four districts during the life of the project, and a whole outcome area focussed on recording the benefits of ECE), we agreed at our meeting with DOET, PPC and Plan in Gia Lai on June 30 2016 that crystallising these approaches into a simple 'roadmap' made sense.</p> <p>The roadmap will identify the top six or so actions that the project will take to ensure sustainability, including <i>existing</i> project plans to replicate teacher training groups into non-project areas, uptake of revised curriculum by the Viet Nam Women's Union, and DOET agreement to consider further investment in rolling out new teacher training methods.</p> <p>Action point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>All parties</u> to conclude sustainability plan by the end of July 2016. Sustainability is the key risk to the project. refer letter attached Appendix B. An important part of the plan will be dissemination of project benefits through media and events, plus uptake of the project approach by UNICEF and other donors working in ECE in Gia Lai. <b>Sustainability completed and agreed September 2016 (3/17)</b></li> </ul> <p><u>Response to specific recommendations:</u> No.1,2,3,13 (finding ways to draw in the PPC and boost provincial level ownership);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>MFAT</u> to visit more frequently (every 6 months minimum) to build relationship with PPC. This is already under way. <b>Next visit due 3/17.</b></li> <li>➢ <u>MFAT</u> to ask PPC to chair DOET's Project Management Board meetings from now on, or at a minimum, chair the meetings between NZAP, DOET, and Plan during project visits. <b>On agenda for next visit 3/17.</b></li> </ul> <p>No. 10 (continue to ensure project is part of wider DOET planning and budgeting);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>MFAT</u> to seek DOET's own annual work plans and budgets and requiring these to include project activities and to be tabled on a 6 monthly basis. <b>No progress as at 3/17, will keep pursuing this.</b></li> </ul> <p>No. 19, 20 (increasing focus on risk management through sustainability plan).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ <u>Plan International</u> will be required to show evidence of greater emphasis on replication in the Y5 and Y6 work plans. <b>Completed, see Year 5 workplan (3/17)</b></li> </ul>





## MFAT follow up actions

This table lists actions that MFAT will undertake in response to the findings, lessons and recommendations of the evaluation.

Lesson learned / Recommendation	Action	Who will action	When	Resource Implications
Lesson: PPC needs to be more involved	More frequent Embassy visits to engage with PPC and draw them into management discussions and to seek their support for resolving project issues.	NZ Embassy Update 3/17: No visit possible in second half of 2016 due to staff absences and changes, but there's close monitoring and our next visit is scheduled for 14 March 2017, and we expect to visit more frequently after that.	Already under way with June 2016 visit. 6 monthly (minimum) from that point.	None. This is easily within the Embassy's travel budget.
Lesson: The project should have been designed for more direct accountability	Not able to be changed now, but can be addressed through active project management e.g. withholding further grant funding until we have received satisfactory completion reports of physical works done to date.	NZ Embassy, Plan Funds were withheld until conditions were met in September 2016. Close monitoring since then and follow up visit happening 14 March 2017.	Ongoing, but with special emphasis on project visits and annual reporting.	None.
Recommendation 1: Sustainability roadmap	Agreed. Will be completed by end of July 2016.	Plan International, DOET, PPC, NZ Embassy Completed August 2016.	By end of July 2016.	None.
Recommendation 2: Strengthen practice element of training	Partially agreed. Boost in-service training, boost technical support at commune level.	Plan International, DOET. Agreed as part of Y5 workplan in late July 2016.	During Year 5	Can be accommodated within existing budget.

Lesson learned / Recommendation	Action	Who will action	When	Resource Implications
Recommendation 3: Consider extending project.	Agreed. No cost extension to allow a Year 6 has been approved in principle by NZ subject to satisfactory resolution of procurement matters and completion of the sustainability roadmap.	Plan International, DOET, PPC, NZ Embassy. Paperwork has been prepared, all going well this will be rolled out following March 2017 visit, well before April 30 end of Y5.	NZ will take decision in August or September 2016.	Can be accommodated within existing budget.

## Dissemination plan

The evaluation has been shared with partner organisations, MFAT staff and other stakeholders in the following ways:

No.	Method of dissemination	Responsibility of	When
1	All project stakeholders discussed the evaluation at a major workshop in Gia Lai in February 2016 (PPC, DOET, BOET, Women's Union, communities, NZ Aid Programme).	Plan International (who were responsible for contracting the review team and managing the review process)	Feb 2016
2	Viet Nam Ministry of Education and Training	Activity Manager	By 1 September 2016.
3	IDG Wellington (GLO, SED)	Activity Manager	July 2016.