

MFAT Management Response to Mid-Term Review of Halimar, Aprende no Deskobre Susesu (HANDS) Timor-Leste

Evaluation:	Mid-Term Review of Halimar, Aprende no Deskobre Susesu (HANDS)
Background:	<p>‘Halimar, Aprende no Descrobe Susesu’ (HANDS) is a NZ\$12 million programme of support to the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport over a five year period (2015-2020). HANDS will contribute to meeting the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) educational goals by increasing access to quality pre-school education, with a focus on language skills development to assist children in their transition to primary school and beyond.</p> <p>The pre-school education sector goal, also the goal for the HANDS programme, is that Timor-Leste will have <i>effective early childhood education that offers a good quality, well-rounded learning environment focused on development of language and pre-reading skills, which promotes a smooth transition to, and future success at primary school.</i></p> <p>The sector goal is drawn from the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MEYS) priorities as specified in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP).</p> <p>To contribute to the sector goal, the HANDS programme has the long term outcome that <i>Early Child Education for 3 – 5 year olds is improved in terms of access, quality and equity and improved learning outcomes for children especially in the area of literacy and numeracy.</i></p> <p>The HANDS Programme has three medium term outcomes (MTOs): MTO1 focusing on increased access, with MTO 2 focusing on increased quality of pre-school teaching, and MTO3 is focusing on increased quality of the pre-school system. These three MTOs are supported by four short term outcomes (STO).</p>

Findings:

Key findings/conclusions of the Mid-Term Review are:

1. Relevance

The Mid-Term Review found the HANDS programme is highly relevant to Government of Timor-Leste education sector priorities. The HANDS programme also remains relevant to the New Zealand Development Priorities and aligns with the New Zealand Aid Programme's investment priorities, as well as the Joint Commitment for Development between New Zealand and Timor-Leste (2016-2020).

2. Effectiveness

The HANDS programme has experienced significant delays, primarily beyond the control of HANDS team and due to political uncertainty from the government of Timor-Leste in the period of 18 months of 2017-2018. There is limited evidence on the progress made against short- and medium-term outcomes. The MT also found that it is too early to conclude that the HANDS programme is contributing to the long-term outcomes. Despite the delays in the implementation of HANDS Programme, the programme has made some progress toward effectiveness¹ as follows:

- Pre-school enrolment rates have increased since 2014 which shows 25% improvement to access;
- The literacy results have improved marginally as per the finding from a 2017 mini Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). In rural areas 93.1 per cent of Grade 1 pupils were unable to read a single word in a Tetum passage and 58 per cent of Grade 3 pupils were unable to answer a single comprehension question regarding a short passage of text.
- Some aspects of systemic reform including leadership, management and administrative practices have improved;
- New systems for Pre-School Inspectors have been developed, training provided, and implemented; and
- There is a high level ownership of the HANDS Programme in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Programme Management Team (PMT) and Strategic Governance Group and support to PMT and SGG were highly commended.

¹ The Halimar, Aprende no Deskobre Susesu (HANDS) programme Mid-Term Review Report April 2019.

3. Efficiency

The HANDS Programme Team has converted its resources and their influence into meaningful results with reasonable value for money. The programme has built momentum for early childhood education through engaging with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) on a wide range of key strategic areas for improved ECE.

4. Sustainability and future programme

Sustainability was one of the concerns from the MTR team and other stakeholders. Some activities have experienced some delays and are not as far progressed as planned, particularly if the programme were to be completed in May 2020 as planned.

Link to evaluation <http://pam.mfat.net.nz/mp/document/211538/properties>

Date of Steering Group 14 June 2019
sign-off

Approval of the MFAT Management Response

Signature:

Jacquie Dean

Date:

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
1.	<p>The New Zealand Embassy should continue to provide technical, strategic and funding support to early childhood education in Timor-Leste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extend the current phase of the HANDS programme to allow sufficient time to identify learnings and options for an affordable ECE model, to inform the design of a follow-on phase. High Priority ▪ Commence planning for a HANDS redesign for a follow-up phase, drawing on the findings and recommendations from this mid-term review, and any further learning from the outcomes of Phase 1 HANDS programme components. High Priority ▪ Continue to engage in targeted policy dialogue with the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL), MEYS and other donors on options for increased funding to the education sector, and in particular increased funding to early childhood education. Medium Priority 	<p>Partially Agree. Extension will be subject to internal discussion and financial approval with MFAT GDS.</p> <p>MFAT/New Zealand Embassy will consider improvements in these areas;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MFAT would consider additional playgrounds pending evaluation of the use and effectiveness of the playgrounds already constructed. 2. Provision of additional learning materials, to top up all consumable learning materials. 	MFAT/NZ Embassy at Post/HANDS Team	During the design of phase 2	

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		<p>3. Teacher professional development (pre-service and in-service). This will include some curriculum development (noting that this work is likely to take 3 years to draft, test, approve and implement. This work will also rely on the INFORDEPE Institutional Assessment.)</p> <p>4. Continue to support the work of the pre-school inspectors to collect information for decision making process, e.g. school management, teachers management, etc.</p>			

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		5. Pre-School Management that also include parental engagement as part of the pilot during the extension to allow for possible roll-out during HANDS Phase II implementation.			

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2.	<p>The New Zealand Embassy and HANDS programme to work with other partners to support MEYS development of an accessible and affordable model early childhood education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HANDS programme partners (Grow HR, UNICEF and the World Bank) collaborate with MEYS to develop an agreed process, to identify and assess affordable options to deliver early child education in the context of Timor-Leste. High Priority With UNICEF, review the design and implementation approach of the community pre-schools programme to ensure that relevant information required for policy decisions on an affordable model is being collected, or able to be collected. High Priority UNICEF and MEYS (with support from the HANDS programme) develop a comparative costing of the options to enable MEYS to identify an affordable model to deliver pre-schools services, including teacher qualifications and professional development. Options include the formal model, and the formal and community pre-school model combined. This model should demonstrate costs by percentage of 3-5 years olds accessing, and potentially an option that focuses on prioritising 5-year olds. High Priority 	<p>Agree. MFAT/NZ Embassy and HANDS Team will work closely with other partners to ensure that an accessible and affordable model is developed for consideration by MoEYS. This will include HANDS and UNICEF working together to provide MoEYS with costed options of different Pre-School model that may be lower cost than public pre-schools but ensure the delivery of quality ECE as well.</p>	MFAT/NZ Embassy at Post/HANDS Team	During the implementation of HANDS current phase. Will also be considered for new phase as appropriate.	

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No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
3	<p>Until the end of Phase 1, the HANDS programme implements strategies to maximise the quality and sustainability of pre-school playgrounds. Strategies could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consult with partners to reduce playground construction targets to a number that is politically palatable and achievable by the end of HANDS Phase I, based on remaining budget and <i>PNDS</i> capacity (and/or consider alternative delivery mechanisms). High Priority ▪ Work with <i>PNDS</i> to find potential efficiencies in implementation for remaining playgrounds (e.g. leverage <i>PNDS</i> regular activities). High Priority ▪ Strengthen pre-school parental engagement/ownership in early stages of playground discussions. High Priority ▪ Prioritise work on agreed maintenance plans for playgrounds and communicate this to stakeholders. High Priority ▪ Support teachers as part of the roll out of the “Play” module to use the outdoor playground for learning. High Priority <p>Consult with partners on an exit strategy for playgrounds by the end of Phase 1. High Priority</p>	<p>Partially Agree. NZ Embassy/MFAT and HANDS Team will take into account all these recommendations in the current implementation and new design for the second phase of Early Childhood Education Support.</p> <p>We believe <i>PNDS</i> has capacity to complete the original number of agreed playgrounds (150) but will monitor progress on this output carefully and consider reducing total numbers if required.</p>	Dili Post/HANDS Team	During the implementation of HANDS current phase	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
4	<p>HANDS Programme to support a more holistic approach to child development through increased parental engagement & education (Current and future phases) (MTO1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a greater understanding of barriers to, and motivators for enrolment and attendance – including urban, rural and remote geographical variations. High Priority ▪ Consider/pilot opportunities for increased parental engagement across all components of HANDS High Priority e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ engage (and educate) parents and guardians strategically during playground planning discussions; ○ Include key concepts for parents and guardians section in Teacher training modules; and work with municipal government on community engagement (discuss inspector data with parents, campaigns). 	<p>Agree. NZ Embassy/MFAT and HANDS Team will take into account all these recommendations in the current implementation and new design for the second phase of Early Childhood Education Support. This may include engaging additional partners within the HANDS programme and/or future phase as appropriate.</p>	Dili Post/HANDS Team	During HANDS implementation of current phase and new design	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
5	<p>HANDS Programme to increase focus on improving the quality of pre-school teaching in the classroom including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the budget of the National Institute for Training Teachers and Education Professionals (INFORDEPE), prioritise the rollout of core modules (in particular the “Play” module) in the remainder of the HANDS programme period (to May 2020), through support for trainers and Grupo Trabalho Profesores (GTP) activities. High Priority With INFORDEPE (Peskiza), monitor what works and why, to provide an evidence base for further development of training modules and the overall approach to training pre-school teachers. High Priority Consider and/or pilot options for ongoing pre-school teacher mentoring (longer term), recognising this might look different in different municipalities. Medium Priority 	<p>Partially agree. We will discuss with INFORDEPE, DFAT, World Bank in regards to the support to INFORDEPE.</p> <p>MoEYS will be focusing on increasing the access of pre-school across the country. However, there is a need to also focus on improving the quality of pre-school services for children who are in the pre-schools.</p>	Dili Post/HANDS	Before the end of 2019	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
6	<p>HANDS Programme to further strengthen the pre-school inspectorate system to contribute to quality teaching and learning in pre-schools including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refine the pre-school inspectorate model further to prioritise questions related to key priorities for MEYS and known drivers of school improvement. High Priority ▪ Engage with the inspectorate and Apoio Lideransa liu hosi Mentoria no Aprendizagem (ALMA) to transition to an efficient model of inspection, aligned to the need for broader Inspectorate reform, including a sustainable approach to reporting and use of information communication technologies across the inspectorate. High Priority ▪ Use the launch and socialisation of the Inspection Manual to promote further alignment of the pre-schools inspectorate with the broader inspectorate covering primary and secondary schools and reinforce a focus on quality teaching and learning. High Priority ▪ Develop and implement an exit strategy for the HANDS support to the pre-school inspectorate. High Priority 	<p>Agree. The Dili Post will discuss with HANDS Team to ensure this recommendation is taking into account for the support with Inspectorate Office but also consider other donor contributions such as DFAT's ALMA programme.</p>	<p>Dili Post/HANDS</p>	<p>In the third quarter 2019</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
7	<p>HANDS Programme to improve leadership and management at national and municipal level (MTO 3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit Work plan (Output 6) and Capacity Development Plans and prioritise areas for support and professional development, with what can realistically be achieved between now and the end of this phase of HANDS. High Priority Dedicate HANDS advisory support and resources to what is identified. High Priority Be opportunistic in relation to Municipal support (defer comprehensive approach to HANDS beyond 2020). Medium Priority Utilise any learnings from ALMA/PMLP that involves sub-national support for strengthened pre-school management systems. Medium Priority Develop clear strategies to maximise skills transfer from HANDS programme advisers to key MEYS staff. Developing a more deliberate approach to monitoring skills transfer will enable HANDS to understand successes and identify where further engagement and/or different strategies are required. High Priority 	<p>Agree. Some aspects of this recommendation will be incorporated in the current phase and some aspects will be considered in the design second phase. Both will require close coordination with government to ensure that they align with decentralization policies and processes within Ministry of Education.</p>	<p>Dili Post/HANDS team/ new design team</p>	<p>In 2019 and 2020 at second phase design</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
8	<p>The HANDS programme should strengthen their Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the Theory of Change and the Results Framework to reflect the changes to the HANDS programme. High Priority Determine realistic targets for 2019/2020, and use these targets to demonstrate progress towards the HANDS programme outcomes. High Priority Review the indicators to ensure that they reflect data that can be collected within the timeframe. Develop key evaluative questions (qualitative indicators) at the MTO level, to provide a framework for analysis of progress towards outcomes. High Priority 	<p>Agree. We will make sure the M&E aspects of the HANDS Programme is reflecting this particular recommendation for this current phase and also in the second phase design.</p> <p>Note: Theory of change will be reviewed in Q3 2019 and presented to Programme Management Team and Strategic Governance Group of HANDS for approval.</p>	<p>Dili Post/HANDS Team/Second phase design team</p> <p>HANDS Team</p>	<p>Revise existing Results Framework by Q3 2019</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
9	<p>For phase 2 of HANDS, the design team, NZ Embassy and the HANDS programme consider and agree upfront with MEYS more deliberate approach to sustainability (all medium priority).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a sustainability matrix with stakeholders that cover each component which outlines what are realistic goals in relation to sustainability and measure progress through a participatory process every 6 months. ▪ Promote/incentivise cost sharing between pre-school and GoTL (MEYS) and where appropriate set targets or plan for a phase out of New Zealand's pre-school funding. ▪ Support on-going policy dialogue around the development of an affordable model of pre-school services (See Recommendation 2). ▪ Use the new planning and policy reforms from the Education Sector Plan (being developed by MoEYS) and community pre-school model options/evidence as an opportunity to discuss affordability options across the sub-sector. 	Agree. We will take into account in discussions with MEYS.	MFAT/NZ Embassy/ Design Team	During design of the new phase	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Entity broader systems issues impeding improvement to early childhood development. Use influence with MEYS and leverage support from other donors to tackle these issues.				

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
10	<p>As part of the next design phase, the NZ Embassy, the design team and the HANDs programme consider the following (<i>all Medium Priority</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued focus on a sustainable approach to teacher training and mentoring that improves teacher practice in the classroom. Increased focus on all aspects of school readiness including parental engagement and education, transition to primary including support for Year 1 teachers Investigate opportunities to leverage initiatives that promote inclusive education. Consider balance of support at national and local levels and, where possible, support local solutions for local problems, not necessarily a one size fits all approach. Investigate the use of PNDS systems to incentivise greater community engagement in pre-schools through increased list of options specifically related to pre-schools. Targeted institutional reform and professional development with GoTL based on an affordable model and lessons from HANDS phase 1. 	<p>Agree. We will reflect this recommendation in the design of the next phase.</p> <p>We also note that any future design will need to align with the Education Sector Plan for Timor-Leste (once finalised)</p>	MFAT/HANDS Design Team Team/	During design phase in 2020	