

# Evaluation of the Quality Education Programme in Solukhumbu, Nepal

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Date: 9 November 2024

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Image: A child returning from school in Solukhumbu



# Abstract

This evaluation examines the Quality Education Programme in Solukhumbu (QEPS), an initiative funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Himalayan Trust New Zealand. The programme is implemented by the Himalayan Trust New Zealand and Himalayan Trust Nepal. The Activity aims to improve teaching and learning outcomes for children in Solukhumbu, Nepal, by enhancing literacy, teacher training, and providing educational resources.

The evaluation considered the programme's effectiveness, efficiency, impact, relevance, and sustainability. Data was collected in August and September 2024 through key informant interviews, group discussions, and school observations in Solukhumbu. Additional documents and primary data was collected from stakeholders based in Kathmandu, Nepal and New Zealand. The evaluation employed an analytical framework focusing on social behaviour, political context, knowledge, and resources, with Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion as a cross-cutting theme.

The findings indicate that QEPS is making significant progress toward achieving its outputs and outcomes, with most targets met or on track. The programme has effectively enhanced teachers' knowledge and skills, improved classroom practices, and increased student engagement and learning achievements. The management of the programme is efficient and demonstrates good value for money through collaborative funding, transparent procurement, and inclusive decision-making processes. Challenges remain in ensuring the sustainability of outcomes due to resource constraints faced by schools and local governments.

## Executive Summary

### Background and evaluation design

New Zealand, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), prioritizes education as a key component of its Official Development Assistance to partner countries. In Nepal, this support is provided through the Quality Education Programme in Solukhumbu (QEPS), implemented by the Himalayan Trust New Zealand (HTNZ) and its local partner, Himalayan Trust Nepal (HTN). The total budget of the Activity is NZD 3,263,019, with MFAT funding 59% and HTNZ funding 41%. The Activity is being implemented between November 2019 and April 2025.

The QEPS aims to improve teaching and learning outcomes in the Solukhumbu district by enhancing literacy programs, providing teacher training, and supporting schools with resources, scholarships, and classroom infrastructure.

The evaluation, using the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria seeks to inform future programming and understand whether the Activity is *relevant*, whether its outputs and outcomes are being achieved (is it *effective*), whether it is well-run (is it *efficient*), is it achieving *impact*, and are the outcomes *sustainable*. Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) is considered as a cross-cutting theme.

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach comprising of a document review, key informant interviews, group discussions, and school observations in Solukhumbu, and (virtual/in-person) key informant interviews and group discussions with stakeholders





based in Kathmandu, Nepal and New Zealand. Data was analysed against a framework with four dimensions: behaviour, political/policy, knowledge, and resources.

## **Key findings**

### **Evaluation Question 1: To what extent have the agreed outputs been delivered**

The QEPS is making strong progress towards achieving its outputs, with no indicators for the outputs falling far behind and only five out of 23 indicators still requiring concerted effort to achieve them before the end of the Activity. Stakeholders particularly appreciate the combination of high-quality training and support for teaching and learning materials, as well as efforts to coordinate with local governments.

### **Evaluation Question 2: To what extent have the short, medium, and long term outcomes been achieved**

From the 23 short-, medium-, and long-term outcome indicators, 15 have been achieved, 6 have made good progress, and 2 are behind. The main challenges in achieving outcomes relate to higher dropout rates in selected areas and difficulties in reducing teacher turnover.

### **Evaluation Question 3: What are the key factors that contributed to the outputs and outcomes not being met?**

There are multiple factors that constrain achieving positive outcomes, particularly related to the lack of human and financial resources faced by schools and local governments in Solukhumbu. It should be noted that these are frequently beyond the control of the Activity. Instead, they emanate from the wider implementation context in Solukhumbu and Nepal more broadly. Turnover of teachers and members of the School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and the lack of performance management mechanisms for teachers, further constrain the achievement of outcomes.

### **Evaluation Question 4: To what extent is the Activity being managed effectively (systems, processes, management and governance) and efficiently (value for money)?**

The Activity delivers strong VfM through efficient resource use, inclusive practices, and educational impact, but effectiveness can improve with better feedback and stronger, more timely engagement with stakeholders at local level. The Activity has effectively adapted to changing circumstances during COVID-19, and its spending is on track to avoid rushed and inefficient spending towards the end of the Activity.

### **Evaluation Question 5: To what extent is the Activity supporting the sustainability and capacity of local partners?**

The local implementing partner, HTN, appears to be a well-run organisation with a broad range of funding partners and activities beyond the QEPS, and it is likely to be sustainable, despite the importance of the QEPS as a flagship programme. HTNZ supports HTN with administrative, reporting, and monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning support as well as education-specific knowledge capacity.

### **Evaluation Question 6: What is the likely sustainability of the outcomes?**

The knowledge and skills trained teachers possess, and the behaviour they exhibit in their teaching practice are to some extent sustainable beyond the completion of the Activity. However, the effective utilisation of these skills can be undermined when schools lack the necessary means to implement the integrated curriculum and child-centred teaching practices or if teachers are transferred. Schools and local governments will not be able to continue to provide the teaching and learning materials which are currently provided by the Activity, and 'exit planning' needs to be strengthened.



**Evaluation Question 7: To what extent is the Activity supported by the Government of Nepal and communities where it operates?**

Local governments in Solukhumbu, and the communities they represent, support the QEPS and demonstrate this through co-funding. As such it is an example of where support is not only expressed verbally but also through resource contributions. The federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology is also appreciative of the QEPS as it helps ensure federal guidance is implemented at the local level, especially with regards to the Continuous Assessment System (CAS).

**Evaluation Question 8: What is the level of public support for this Activity in New Zealand?**

HTNZ (and by association the QEPS) has public support in New Zealand as demonstrated by the level of all forms of public 'giving' to the organisation. The challenge will be sustaining support for the value associated with the legacy of Sir Edmund Hillary to ensure ongoing support for HTNZ's work, including the QEPS.

**Evaluation Question 9: What are the public diplomacy benefits for New Zealand as a result of this Activity?**

HTNZ offers significant potential for the realisation of public diplomacy benefits which would benefit MFAT and HTNZ, but this potential is currently not being fully realised.

**Evaluation Question 10: What should be considered in any future design and delivery of the HTNZ's programming to ensure it is relevant to the needs of communities, is delivered effectively and efficiently, and is delivering sustainable outcomes?**

Any future design should consider:

- 1) extending training to more members of the SMC and PTA who should then pass on their knowledge to other members;
- 2) whether volunteering can help strengthen the Activity;
- 3) expanding the coverage of early childhood education from grades 1-3 to grade 5;
- 4) increasing the attention for GEDSI, in particular regarding awareness on disabilities;
- 5) developing a shared understanding among stakeholders (including MFAT) on what 'sustainability' means within the context of QEPS so that the Activity can deliberately work towards this;
- 6) signing comprehensive Memorandums of Understanding with local governments;
- 7) support local governments to develop their education policies and plans and improve and institutionalise education-related processes;
- 8) how different spheres of Nepal's government can be supported to implement existing policies.

**Evaluation Question 11: What are the key strengths of the Activity?**

The Activity's key strengths can be found across the dimensions of resources, knowledge, and behaviour. The integrated approach whereby the QEPS works with stakeholders at different levels and provides both resources and helps to build capacity are integral to the success of the Activity.

**Evaluation Question 12: What are 3-4 key improvements that could be made to the Activity?**

The Activity could:

- 1) strengthen its support to local governments with regards to coordination of education stakeholders and learning from each other, including further institutionalising joint monitoring;
- 2) improve the timing of the orientation to PTAs and SMCs; and



- 3) develop a clear phase-out / exit strategy, which is clearly and continuously discussed with schools and local governments from the start to the end of the Activity.

### **Findings on Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion:**

The QEPS has increased its efforts to include GEDSI into its activities since 2023. This is most visible through its efforts to raise awareness of GEDSI among its own staff, adopting an internal GEDSI policy, and among head teachers and members of SMCs and PTAs. The QEPS shows dedication towards promoting GEDSI within the Activity, but further efforts can be made with regards to safeguarding and disability inclusion.

## **Conclusions**

### **Behaviour, knowledge, and resources**

The Activity has had considerable positive impact on the education stakeholders in Solukhumbu. Noticeable behavioural changes took place among students, teachers, SMCs, PTAs, and parents. Students are said to be more motivated and disciplined as a result of access to better learning materials, child-friendly furniture, and the introduction of the CAS. Teachers, meanwhile, use their improved knowledge, skills, and access to materials to deliver a child-friendly curriculum. Knowledge of teachers regarding the CAS, integrated curriculum, and child-friendly pedagogy is being increased through the Activity's training. Similarly, SMCs and PTAs are becoming more effective as trainings help them understand their roles better. Turnover of local government officials, teachers, and SMC and PTA members remains a challenge to retaining knowledge on quality education, though it should be acknowledged this falls outside the control of the Activity.

### **Policy**

In the political and policy realm, challenges remain. Not all local governments have strong and localised education plans and policies, and a mechanism for the performance management of teachers is lacking. A substantial increase in human/financial resources for education from local governments is unrealistic in the short to medium term. On a positive note, joint monitoring between HTN and local governments is seen as positive and effective in increasing quality education, even if human resource constraints within the education section of local governments means this is not always effectively implemented. School Improvement Plans are being developed with support from the Activity, but efforts need to be made to ensure they include a focus on quality education.

The resources provided to schools through the Activity are crucial to delivering quality education outcomes, but more attention needs to be paid to how these outcomes can be sustained once the Activity ends.

## **Recommendations**

All recommendations are geared towards a possible future QEPS. Recommendations are structured around recommendations for 1) the Federal/Provincial level, local government level, school level, and the management of the Activity itself. For brevity, the table with recommendations in this Executive Summary only includes the high priority recommendations while the full list at the end of the report includes medium priority recommendations as well. The recommendation number corresponds with the number in the full recommendation table in the main report.



Related to the Activity Design and Implementation at Federal/Provincial level	
1	The Activity needs to (continue to) explore how its engagement with federal/provincial institutions (through MoUs) can help to ensure alignment between institutions in pursuit of delivering quality education at the local level. An important aspect on this is providing periodic updates / learning to provincial and federal institutions as needed. Medium / High
Related to the Activity Design and Implementation at Local Government level	
2	Ensure that work in any local government is underpinned by a MoU with that local government setting out roles, responsibilities, and expectations, including in relation to sustainability.
3	Local governments need to be supported in coordinating education stakeholders within their area, and an effective coordination and learning mechanism among stakeholders needs to be designed and implemented under the leadership of local governments. This should be led by the local government, but the QEPS can encourage and support this.
4	Support local governments to develop <i>and</i> implement education-related policies, acts, regulations, procedures, guidelines, and plans with a focus on quality education, child-friendly learning environments, and GEDSI, where appropriate and under the leadership of local government. Areas for specific attention include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Support for the development of a local curriculum, as specified under the existing Memorandum of Understanding with the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development.</li> <li>B. If requested support in the development of a performance management mechanism for teachers, so teachers have the right incentives to deliver quality education.</li> </ul>
5	Joint monitoring between the QEPS and local governments during which implementation is monitored and teachers/schools are provided with feedback needs to be further institutionalized.
Related to the Activity Design and Implementation at School level	
7	The Activity design needs to ensure that its training for SMC and PTA members reaches all members of these bodies, covering both the roles of their bodies <i>and</i> the QEPS itself.
10	Ensure that quality education aspects are integrated into School Improvement Plans.
11	Develop a mentoring system for teachers at school-level to provide less experienced teachers with feedback and suggestions. Such a system could draw on the Teachers Mentoring Tools developed by Centre for Education and Human Resource Development and can help sustain a culture of continuous feedback and improvement where the Activity and local governments are not able to do so.
12	GEDSI should be further integrated into the Activity's training curriculum. Concrete training materials for teachers, SMCs, and PTAs on Safeguarding and GEDSI should be developed, including covering the role of schools in safeguarding and the identification of students with disabilities. The latter could include drawing on the Washington Group short set on functioning to identify the children with disabilities under QEPS.
Related to the management of the Activity	
13	Planning for sustainability and an exit strategy should be more structurally embedded in the Activity Design and throughout HTN's engagements with schools, local governments, and other stakeholders. This should be underpinned by a shared understanding between HTN, HTNZ, and MFAT on what 'sustainability' means within the context of QEPS.



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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Full text
ADD	Activity Design Document
CAS	Continuous Assessment System
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
CEHRD	Centre for Education and Human Resource Development
EQ	Evaluation Question
GD	Group Discussion
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
HT	Himalayan Trust
HTN	Himalayan Trust Nepal
HTNZ	Himalayan Trust New Zealand
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPLRM	Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural Municipality
LG	Local Government
LIL	Literacy Integrated Learning
LIP	Literacy Improvement Programme
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PMEC	Priority Based Minimum Enabling Conditions
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
QEPS	Quality Education Programme in Solukhumbu
RM	Rural Municipality
SBTTP	School-Based Teacher Trainer Programme
SEE	Secondary Education Examination
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
VfM	Value for Money



# 1

## Background

### THE ACTIVITY

New Zealand prioritises education as part of its Official Development Assistance to partner countries.<sup>1</sup> Nepal receives such assistance through the support provided to the Quality Education Programme in Solukhumbu (QEPS, 'the Activity')<sup>2</sup> from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

Education in Nepal is guided by the Nepal School Education Sector Plan (2022/23-2031/32); Compulsory and Free Education Regulation, 2020; Integrated Curriculum Implementation Guidelines - 'Hamro Serofero' (Our Surrounding), 2020; National Education Policy, 2019; Compulsory and Free Education Act, 2018; and the National Curriculum Framework, 2018. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) has, amongst others, developed guidelines and other documentation related to the professional development of teacher and physical infrastructure of schools.

The responsibility for the provision of (public) basic and secondary education in Nepal, and thus compliance with the aforementioned documents, is devolved to the local government (LG) level. However, in Nepal, local governments are severely under resourced from both a human and financial perspective, resulting in a need for external support to meet their mandated responsibilities, such as the provision of public education.

The Activity is being implemented in Solukhumbu district, which consists of eight LGs, in the mountain or Himalayan region in North-East Nepal. It is the district in which Mount Everest is located and which, through the work and legacy of Sir Edmund Hillary, has a longstanding connection to New Zealand.

The QEPS aims to form a firm foundation for children's educational journey by ensuring a quality literacy and education programme is in place for early grades, teachers are trained in quality teaching at all levels, and schools are more broadly supported with resources, scholarships and infrastructure. It seeks to do this through the delivery of five outputs which are captured in Figure 1. These outputs, through a series of short, medium, and long-term outcomes should ultimately contribute to improved teaching and learning outcomes in Solukhumbu.

The Activity Design Document (ADD) for QEPS was prepared in July 2019 and states that the total Activity budget is NZD 3,263,019. MFAT will fund 59% while the Himalayan Trust (HT) will fund 41% of this amount. MFAT signed the Grant Funding Agreement with the HT New Zealand – (HTNZ) in which MFAT agreed to fund the Activity to a maximum of New

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1 MFAT (n.d.), "Our Priorities", available on [Our priorities | New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(mfat.govt.nz\)](https://www.mfat.govt.nz)

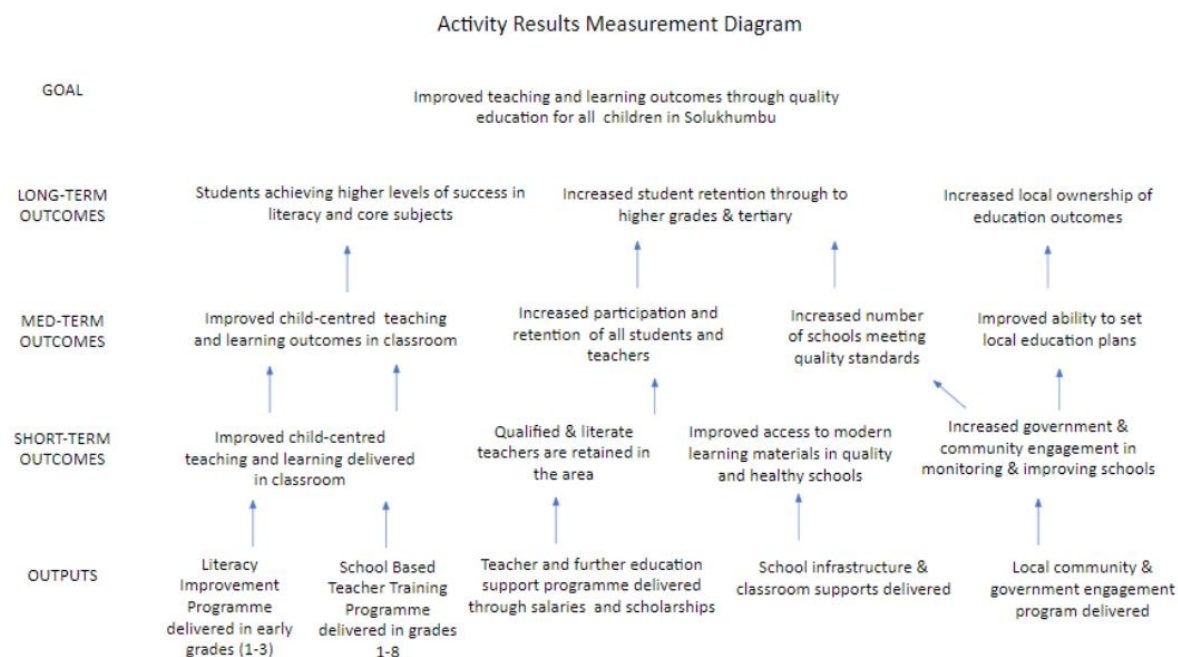
2 'The Activity' and QEPS are used interchangeably throughout the report.



Zealand Dollar (NZD) 1,925,000.<sup>3</sup> The Activity was initially set to run from 13 November 2019 to 31 October 2024. Since then, five Letters of Variation have been signed between MFAT and HTNZ which have seen the final date of Outputs 1, 2, 4, and 5 extended to 30 April 2025, and that of Output 3 extended to 31 January 2028.<sup>4</sup> These extensions do not carry cost implications for MFAT.

Further details on the background and context to the Activity, as well as the evaluation's purpose and design which is discussed in the next section, can be found in Appendix A: Evaluation Plan.

**Figure 1: Activity Results Diagram<sup>5</sup>**



## EVALUATION PURPOSE AND DESIGN

### PURPOSE

The evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR) defines the evaluation purpose as:

"This evaluation will be used by HTNZ and MFAT to understand to what extent the Activity is:

- achieving its goal of improving teaching and learning outcomes through quality education for all children in Solukhumbu, Nepal
- being managed effectively and to support sustainability
- supported by the Government of Nepal and communities
- delivering public diplomacy outcomes for the Government of New Zealand.

3 MFAT (2019), "Grant Funding Agreement: Quality Education in the Solukhumbu, Nepal 2019 – 2024", Document number: DOC-4053077.

4 MFAT (2024), "Grant Funding Arrangement VARIATION No. 5 Quality Education in Solukhumbu 2019-2024", File Reference: WPG-0101943-DOC-4167419.

5 MFAT (2019), "Activity Design Document: HTNZ 2019-2024", Document ID: FINALJL301019





The evaluation will be used to inform decisions on the next phase of the Activity, including whether to continue with the current direction or consider changes that would improve the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the Activity”.<sup>6</sup>

From the kick-off meeting with MFAT, HTNZ, and HT Nepal (HTN) it has also become really clear that another important purpose is to identify, as they put it, “actionable insights” for a potential future phase of the Activity.<sup>7</sup>

## SCOPE

The evaluation ToR defined the evaluation scope as:

“The scope of the evaluation will include:

- the time period the evaluation will cover is 2019 to 2024
- its geographic focus is Solukhumbu, Nepal
- the target groups are students, their families, teachers and headmasters, parent-teacher associations, local government in Solukhumbu and central government.

The scope of the evaluation will exclude:

- HTNZ’s work not funded by MFAT”.<sup>8</sup>

During the kick-off meeting, no changes to this scope were discussed. As a result, the agreed evaluation questions (EQs) that are addressed in this report are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Evaluation questions**

#	Evaluation questions
	<b>Objective 1: To examine the progress and impact in achieving the Activity’s outputs and outcomes (Effectiveness, Impact)</b>
EQ1	To what extent have the agreed outputs been delivered
EQ2	To what extent have the short, medium, and long term outcomes been achieved
EQ3	What are the key factors that contributed to the outputs and outcomes not being met (if there are any)
	<b>Objective 2: To examine the management and sustainability of the Activity (Efficiency, Sustainability)</b>
EQ4	To what extent is the Activity being managed effectively (systems, processes, management and governance) and efficiently (value for money)?
EQ5	To what extent is the Activity supporting the sustainability and capacity of local partners?
EQ6	What is the likely sustainability of the outcomes?
	<b>Objective 3: To examine the level of support for this work in New Zealand and Nepal (Relevance, Impact)</b>

6 MFAT (2019), “Evaluation Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the Himalayan Trust New Zealand’s Quality Education in Solukhumbu programme 2019-2024”, Document ID: INTD-124-2176, p. 3.

7 Inception meeting between MFAT, HT, and IOD PARC, 10 July 2024.

8 MFAT (2019), “Evaluation Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the Himalayan Trust New Zealand’s Quality Education in Solukhumbu programme 2019-2024”, Document ID: INTD-124-2176, p. 4-5.



EQ7	To what extent is the Activity supported by the Government of Nepal and communities where it operates?
EQ8	What is the level of public support for this Activity in New Zealand?
EQ9	What are the public diplomacy benefits for New Zealand as a result of this Activity?
	<b>Objective 4: Future design and support – to identify the key learnings to increase positive impact in the future.</b>
EQ10	What should be considered in any future design and delivery of the HTNZ's programming to ensure it is relevant to the needs of communities, is delivered effectively and efficiently, and is delivering sustainable outcomes?
EQ11	What are the key strengths of the Activity?
EQ12	What are 3-4 key improvements that could be made to the Activity?

## DESIGN

This is a summative evaluation, with formative aspects, taking place towards the end of the Activity and intended to inform learning, decision-making, and accountability as per MFAT's evaluation policy. It is focused on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability. It is also utilisation-focused which means it seeks to support the key stakeholders, primarily MFAT as well as HTNZ and HTN in improving future programming, either in future iterations of this Activity or for other activities.

The evaluation combines multiple methods (document review, key informant interviews (KIIs) group discussions (GDs), and observations of classrooms and infrastructure) to gain an in-depth understanding of how delivered outputs contribute to outcomes and to identify lessons and areas for improvement. The focus is therefore on qualitative data collection, though quantitative data obtained from HTN has been used, in particular to assess whether outputs and outcomes have been achieved.

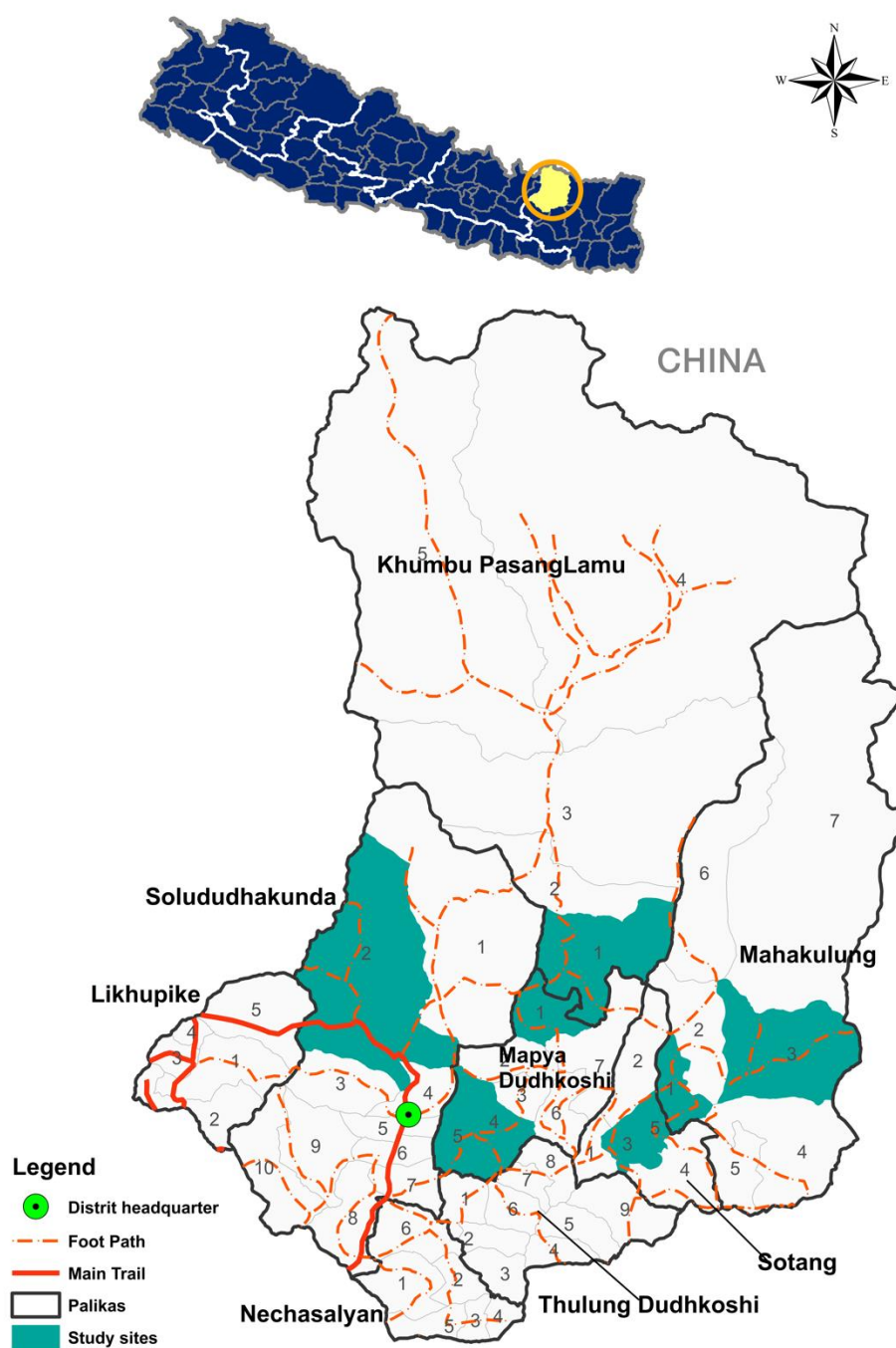
Primary data collection in Solukhumbu took place between 19-24 August 2024.<sup>9</sup> Outside this fieldwork period, further (remote) KIIs were conducted with scholarship beneficiaries, HTN, HTNZ, EduTech Nepal<sup>10</sup>, and MFAT. The evaluation team includes two people from Solukhumbu to ensure that sufficient local knowledge exists within the team to help contextualise findings. Figure 2 shows where in Solukhumbu data has been collected, and Table 2 provides a summary of the collected data.

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9 The evaluation team worked closely with HTN to develop a field visit schedule which would allow the evaluation team to visit as many schools as possible within the limited time available. While there is no reason to assume the final selection of schools represents a biased sample in any particular way, the sample is a convenience sample rather than a random or representative sample.

10 EduTech Nepal is a Activity partner for the delivery of Output 4: school infrastructure and classroom support.



**Figure 2: Data collection sites in Solukhumbu****Table 2: Collected primary data**

Schools visited	14, including one non-QEPS schools
KIIs conducted	22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1x School Management Committee Chair</li> <li>- 4x Head teacher</li> <li>- 2x Parent-Teacher Association Chair</li> <li>- 8x Government officials (local, provincial, and federal level)</li> <li>- 6x Scholarship beneficiaries</li> </ul>



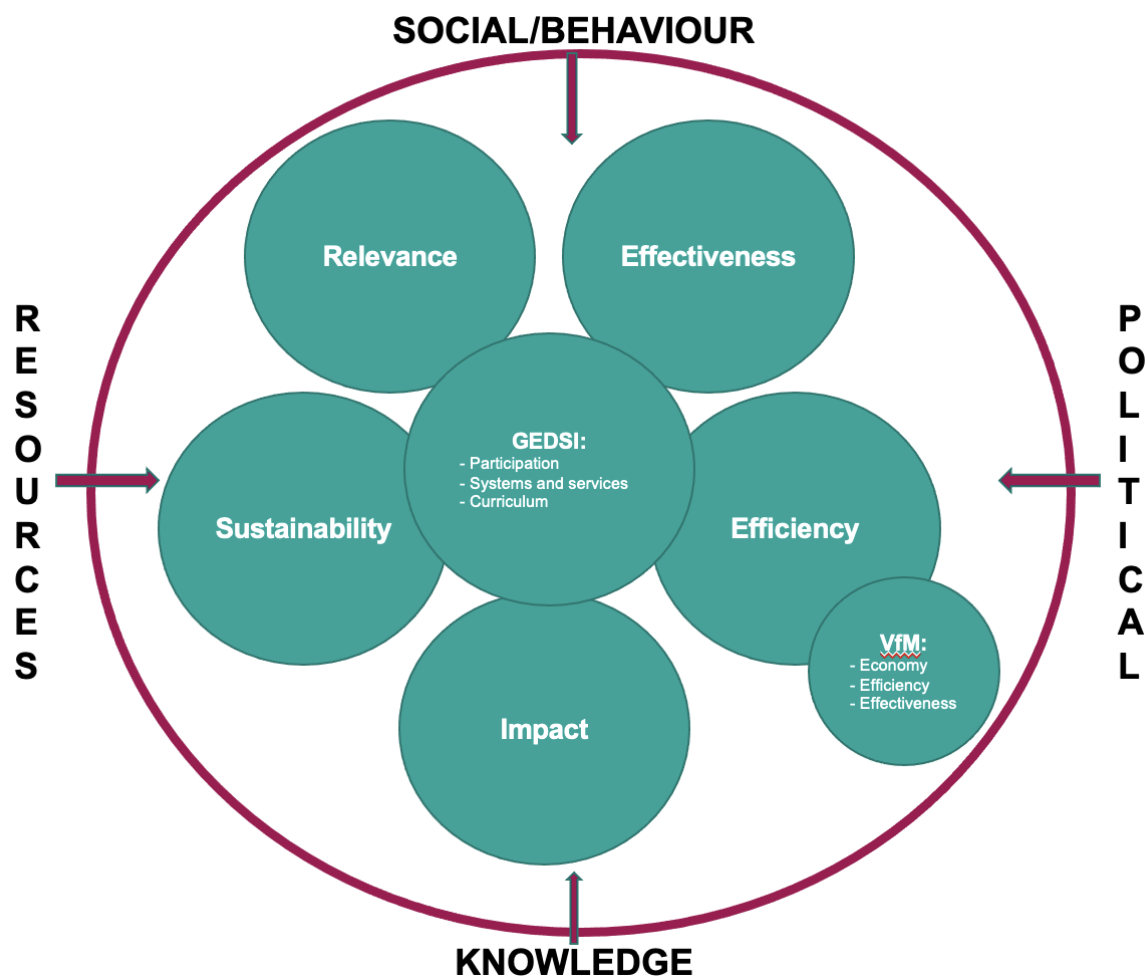
	- 1x Other
GDs conducted	30 <sup>11</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 11x School Management Committee</li> <li>- 12x Teachers</li> <li>- 9x Parent-Teacher Associations</li> <li>- 5x Government officials (local and federal level)</li> <li>- 2x Other</li> </ul>
Observations conducted	12 Schools

To support the analysis and sensemaking of data, an analytical framework has been developed which is based on four dimensions: social/behaviour, 2) political, 3) knowledge, and 4) resources. Within this, Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) is integrated as a cross-cutting theme. Value for Money (VfM) is an important element within the efficiency evaluation criteria and has been assessed by looking at aspects of economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. Figure 3 visualises this analytical framework, which is further elaborated below.

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<sup>11</sup> The breakdown adds up to more than 30 because in some group discussions members of different bodies at school-level sometimes joined the same meeting.



**Figure 3: Analytical framework for the QEPS evaluation**

Collected data has been analysed against this framework using a combination of Miro (a virtual whiteboard), Excel, and MAXQDA (a tool for qualitative data analysis). The analysis has been further informed by internal team workshops to flush out key findings and how these relate to the four dimensions of the analytical framework.

#### **INDIGENOUS EXPERTISE AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

The evaluation team included two members as local enumerators from indigenous populations in Solukhumbu who participated in data collection and analysis. Enumerators were trained prior to the fieldwork via a virtual workshop. Data quality and interpretation has been ensured through a combination of training prior to data collection, the development of data collection tools that are easy to use and clear, and a post-fieldwork workshop in Kathmandu. Through involving team members from Solukhumbu in the analysis of data, we have sought to contribute to their skill development and to involve them in a more substantial evaluation role than is typically the case when enumerators solely act as data collectors and/or facilitators/translators.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS**

This report must be read with a number of limitations and constraints in mind.

First, the resources available and evaluation timeline, the high number of visited schools, and the travel time between locations, meant that the evaluation team was usually only able to spend 1.5 – 2 hours at each school to conduct meetings with the teachers, School



Management Committees (SMCs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and to carry out the classroom and infrastructure observations.<sup>12</sup> This inevitably has an impact on the level of detail and extent of probing during interviews. Nonetheless, the team deemed it preferable to visit more schools given that otherwise the sample would have become too small to draw strong insights. The team has extensively engaged with HTN before and after the fieldwork to help clarify programming and to help understand the QEPS context, and to obtain details which were insufficiently clear from the fieldwork, e.g., regarding Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

Second, as a result of time pressure and the way in which people typically respond to field visits in Nepal, some group discussions were attended by members of different bodies at school-level (SMC, PTA, and teachers). Often, within communities there is a lot of anticipation for field visits from external parties, and people are keen to attend, but also walk in/out of meetings, which is very difficult (and socially inappropriate) to strictly control. As a result, despite planning for separate meetings with different school-level bodies, there was often some overlap in attendance which blurred the lines of who was answering what.

Third, limited information and informants were available to answer EQs 8 and 9, meaning the evidence base for these findings is more limited than for the other EQs and GEDSI. This limitation was discussed during the inception phase, and MFAT acknowledged that obtaining primary data regarding these questions would be difficult to obtain within the time and resources available.

Fourth, it is worth to briefly reflect on the positionality of the evaluation team. During each meeting, the team emphasised that it was conducting an independent evaluation of the QEPS, that team members were neither HTN or MFAT staff, and that the team does not have any role in deciding matters related to the provision of support. Nonetheless, the fact that an external team comes and visits shapes people's responses in two ways:

- 1) Respondents are keen to emphasise the value of the QEPS to their school(s). All (public) schools in Solukhumbu are extremely resource constrained, and stakeholders are keen to both show their appreciation for the support received *and* to highlight the positive aspects/present and as good as possible image of the school(s) to the evaluators.
- 2) Respondents emphasise the challenges they face and where they would like HTN/QEPS to provide further support. They clearly see participating in the evaluation as an opportunity to make their case for further support.

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<sup>12</sup> Only at Namobuddha Basic School was the evaluation team able to spend 4 hours.





## 2

## Overarching Findings

### Findings against the evaluation questions and GEDSI

#### Evaluation Question 1: To what extent have the agreed outputs been delivered

Headline finding: The QEPS is making strong progress towards achieving its outputs, with no indicators for the outputs falling far behind and only five out of 23 indicators still requiring concerted effort to achieve them before the end of the Activity.

#### Delivery of the QEPS outputs

The QEPS has been successful in delivering its outputs. The results framework shows that across the five outputs there are 23 indicators of which 18 have been achieved and five have made substantial progress but have not been fully achieved yet, as can be seen in the Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Progress against outputs**

Output no.	Outputs	Achieved	In progress	Behind
1	Literacy Improvement Programme (LIP) delivered in early grades (1-3)	8	1	
2	School Based Teacher Training Programme (SBTTP) delivered in grades 1-8	3	2	
3	Teacher and further education support programme delivered through salaries and scholarships	3		
4	School infrastructure & classroom supports delivered	3		
5	Local community & government engagement programme delivered	1	2	

Primary data show that – as can be expected – outputs mostly contribute to the knowledge and resources of the QEPS schools. In terms of knowledge, it is widely acknowledged that HTN’s integrated curriculum training has enabled teachers to adopt more child-friendly teaching approaches. This is underpinned by familiarising teachers with a new learning unit-based assessment approach which assesses students’ progress at the end of each learning unit based on their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills instead of (semi-)annual assessments. The new assessment approach is in line with government guidance, and the MoEST expressed appreciation with the QEPS leading in making sure this approach is implemented. The knowledge of teachers is further enhanced through regular visits from HTN staff to schools. During these visits, HTN staff observe teaching and provides feedback.

The primary data show that outputs of the QEPS have contributed to formulation of education policies and plans especially at the rural municipality and school levels, adopting child-centred methodologies and creating child-friendly environment in the classrooms,



increasing parental engagement in the learning processes of children and eventually enhanced learning achievement, knowledge, and behaviour of children.

Training courses for teachers, especially in regard to the Literacy Improvement Programme (LIP – later Literacy Integrated Learning, LIL) and the School-Based Teacher Training Programme (SBTTP) have been regarded as high quality. The SBTTP also benefitted from a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between HTN and the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) which is a body under the Federal MoEST. Resource persons from the CEHRD helped to deliver trainings to teachers ensuring that there was close alignment between the QEPS and federal education thinking and policy, for example when it comes to rolling out the Continuous Assessment System (CAS) for learning units. These trainings strongly contributed to improving both the knowledge and behaviour of teachers. With permission of the Curriculum Development Center (CDC), the QEPS printed and provided schools with copies of the Students Evaluation Record Book and trained teachers in using this. As a result, schools have become more capable and effective in monitoring and evaluating students' learning.

The QEPS has provided salary support to eighteen teachers (output 3) which has been vital to the schools to maintain quality and improve learning achievements of children. The service of these teachers has been essential in retaining quality teachers in schools where the government teachers are often changing or absent from school due to their own exams, training, and reassignment to different schools.

Scholarship provision is the other component of output three. Altogether 147 students (84 female and 63 male) have received scholarships through the Activity to pursue their studies at higher secondary level (grade 11-12) and bachelors level.<sup>13</sup> Interviews with six scholarship beneficiaries confirm that this support has been instrumental to ensure students from remote districts like Solukhumbu have access to higher education, especially when they come from low-income backgrounds. HTN, as part of the QEPS, has a MoU with Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural Municipality (RM) to share the costs of bachelor-level scholarships, with the RM covering 60% of government fees and the QEPS covering the remaining 40%.<sup>14</sup> Scholarship beneficiaries, however, noted that while they valued the support received, they would appreciate further networking and mentoring support from the QEPS.

Resources provided to schools as part of output 4 have been instrumental in helping to deliver quality education. Respondents were very appreciative and indicated that these materials are essential in delivering quality education. Observations across 12 schools show that the provided resources were, by and large, in place. However, in a few cases there were shortcomings. For example, while schools indicated having School Improvement Plans (SIP), copies were not always available, or teachers/SMC members did not know where it was.<sup>15</sup> With regards to reading logbooks, these are still sometimes used in LIL schools, but not always as some schools indicated their use was discontinued after COVID-19 or because the school did not have resources to provide new ones.

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<sup>13</sup> HTN (2023), "Annual Report 2022/23".

<sup>14</sup> The scholarship is based on standard government fees, and if a student attends a private college/university costs might be higher.

<sup>15</sup> HTN has indicated that they were rolling out a new approach to their SIP-related training around the same time as data collection took place. This new approach aims to ensure a more inclusive development process for SIPs. As a result, improvements in this are might happen before the QEPS concludes.



17 The evaluation team only had time to visit one non-QEPS school, however, the team's knowledge of schools in rural Nepal suggests that this school was not exceptionally underresourced.



**Picture 2: Non-QEPS-supported ECD classroom**



For the schools that also received support for computer labs or science labs, the major benefit of this was that students had an opportunity to put their theoretical lessons into practice. There have been no reports of problems with the provided resources, though in one case it was mentioned that the materials for the science lab were insufficient and that the school was expecting further materials. Some schools also highlighted that they had internet connectivity issues. All education software functions without internet connectivity, but students do require connectivity to search for additional materials online.





**Picture 3: A QEPS-supported computer lab**

In terms of output 5, local community and government engagement programme, two of the three indicators under this output require further efforts in the final year of the Activity.

Positive is that the QEPS helped SMCs and PTAs to better understand their role and to take ownership over quality education. However, it was also observed that while some PTA and SMC members feel they have the required knowledge, more recent PTA and SMC members were much less familiar with the QEPS and their own roles. Due to the high turnover of SMC and PTA members this is an area of the QEPS that deserves further attention (see also EQ10, 12 and recommendation #7).

One of the lagging indicators relates to conducting joint monitoring of schools with LG's and local partners. The MoU with the CEHRD also specifies that the QEPS should collaborate with the CEHRD's Education Development and Coordination Unit, Solukhumbu to conduct joint monitoring, but no evidence of this taking place was identified. More progress is also needed in relation to the indicator on organising participatory workshops and orientations with local governments to develop their local education policy, budget and plans. The MoU-stipulated support for education policy formulation was also not evident. KIIs and GDs at the local level further showed that many stakeholders were not (sufficiently) familiar with key policies, acts, and plans regarding education which have been developed at a federal level.

This means that with regards to output 5 most progress is made in increasing stakeholders' knowledge and supporting conducive behaviour, but that in terms of joint monitoring and support for policy formulation more efforts need to be made.



## Evaluation Question 2: To what extent have the short, medium, and long term outcomes been achieved

Headline finding: From the 23 short-, medium-, and long-term outcome indicators, 15 have been achieved, 6 have made good progress, and 2 are behind, as can be seen from the Table 4.

### Progress against indicators

**Table 4: Progress against outcome indicators**

Outcomes	Achieved indicators	In progress	Behind
LTO 1: Students achieving higher levels of success in literacy and other core subjects	1	2	
LTO 2: Increased student retention through to higher grades and tertiary	2	1	
LTO 3: Increased local ownership of education outcomes		2	
MTO 1: Improved child-centred teaching and learning outcomes in classroom	1		
MTO 2: Increased participation and retention of all students and teachers	1		1
MTO 3: Increased number of schools meeting quality standards			1
MTO 4: Improved ability to set local education plans	2		
STO 1: Improved child-centred teaching and learning delivered in classroom	2		
STO 2: Qualified & literate teachers are retained in the area	2		
STO 3: Improved access to modern learning materials in quality and healthy schools	3		
STO 4: Increased government & community engagement in monitoring & improving schools	1	1	

While this shows that the QEPS is largely on track to achieve its outcomes, medium-term outcome (MTO) 2 and 3 deserve further attention and a closer look. In terms of MTO2, there are two indicators:

- 1) Reducing the annual teacher turnover rate from 20% (baseline) to 10%. At the end of year 4, however, teacher turnover rate stood at 15%. HTN reports that “39 teachers (24 male/15 female) left and 44 new teachers (25 male/19 female) joined. Total teachers in SBTP schools is 256”.<sup>18,19</sup>
- 2) The second indicator was to reduce the grade 1 dropout rate by 2%. The baseline for Solukhumbu was 5.5% (girls: 3.38% and boys: 7.58%) and at the end of year 3 the figures were 4.1% (girls: 4.1% and boys: 4.2%), no figures for year 4 were available yet. There is an overall reduction in dropout rate of 1.4% but this is solely

<sup>18</sup> HTN (2024), “Appendix A\_Progress Against Results\_Y4\_Revised 16062024”.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that HTN/the QEPS has no direct control over teacher retention and that while it can advocate with local governments to retain (trained) teachers it cannot guarantee a positive outcome.



attributable to more boys staying in school while the girl dropout rate increased slightly from 3.38% to 4.1%.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, in the Khumbu Pasanglhamau RM (LIP/LIL areas – output 1) the overall dropout rate went from 4.95% (girls: 2.33%, boys: 6.9%) at baseline to 6.6% (girls: 8.1%, boys: 5.2%) at the end of year 3 which appears to show there has been regression against the baseline for girls while there has been progress in reducing the dropout rate for boys. For the Solududhakunda Municipality (SBTTP – output 2), the figures went from 5.49% (girls: 2.49% and boys: 8.45%) at baseline to 3.4% (girls: 2.0% and boys: 4.8%) at the end of year 3, meaning the target in this district was met.<sup>21</sup> As such, it seems that progress towards that MTO2 is uneven across municipalities.

In terms of MTO3 there is one indicator which is the “number of participating schools meeting at least 80% of minimum national quality standards (Priority Based Minimum Enabling Conditions (PMECs) for Basic Education)”. The target for year 4 is that 37 schools meet these criteria (10 SBTTP and 27 LIP). This is an upwardly revised target, and final data will be collected during the 3rd quarter of year 5. At the end of year 3, 9 SBTTP and 15 LIP schools had achieved the indicator. The following paragraphs delve deeper into the qualitative data collected during fieldwork to explain the outcomes.

### Changes in behaviour and practices

Respondents all indicate much improved child-centred teaching practices as a result of the training and material support provided by the QEPS. One teacher said that

“I taught in a private school for 13 years but never got any training. I joined this school last year and got an opportunity to attend seven days training on teaching methods and leadership. We used to make yearly school calendar for exam routine but only after this training we are producing yearly calendar of each and every activity, holidays, festivals and teachers' routine in one calendar which has helped to plan accordingly. I have learned to develop lesson plans and take classes as per plan. My thinking process has changed and now I understand how to deal with students”.

Several behavioural changes have occurred, supporting this, such as using more visual teaching tools and methods which allow young students to express themselves better and to learn with the help of visual aids (see also Picture 1 and 4) and the CAS approach which allows for more tailored feedback. Child-friendly furniture also helps to keep students engaged and motivated to learn and attend school regularly. In schools with a computer lab, students also use computers to look for information and learn outside the computer course, which are not always part of the curriculum, and internet access/connectivity is sometimes an issue when trying to access *additional* online materials. EduTech Nepal, the partner for the computer labs, develops educational content that can also be accessed offline, mitigating the impact of connectivity issues. One head teacher reported that as a result of the installation of a computer lab in their secondary school the pass rate for students taking ICT classes increased from 70% when they only had theoretical knowledge to 98% now. Parents have also become more involved in the education of their children in some cases, which is important in order to achieve learning outcomes.

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<sup>20</sup> The Evaluation Team was not able to identify any specific evidence, such as e.g., migration, that would explain the increased dropout rate for girls.

<sup>21</sup> HTN (2024), “Appendix A\_Progress Against Results\_Y4\_Revised 16062024”.



PTAs and SMCs benefit from training provided by the QEPS, but as mentioned in response to EQ1, their membership changes regularly, and not all members of the PTA and SMC attend trainings as only the Head Teacher (who is the Secretary of the SMC) and Chairperson of the SMC and PTA are invited to participate in these trainings. So, while communities – via the SMC and PTA – become more involved and take more ownership of outcomes, the degree is inconsistent across all supported schools and there is room for further improvement.

### **Changes in the policy environment**

With regards to the policy environment, all visited schools had an SIP – even if not all stakeholders were fully aware of its contents or whether the SIP needed to be reviewed and updated. The formulation of SIPs is a federal requirement, as is the regular updating of the online Integrated Education Management Information System, and schools receive NRS 15,000 from the federal government for this. HTN also provides support for the formulation of SIPs, such as remuneration for resources persons/trainers and costs for the SIP training and logistics.

Schools are also affected by LG decisions. In some cases, computer courses have been removed from the curriculum in favour of teaching English or other subjects. This to some extent reduces the utility of computer labs, even if students find other ways to utilise the computers (e.g. through learning material for other subjects developed by EduTech Nepal). Some of the visited LGs have adopted local and/or federal education acts and guidelines, but Sotang, Mahakulung and Mapya Dudhkoshi RMs have prepared the draft Education Plans themselves. Instead of financial support, the HTN team provided technical inputs in the plan development processes by participating in workshops organized by LGs.

### **Changes in knowledge and capacity**

The knowledge and capacity of teachers, PTAs, and SMCs is increasing which leads some to argue that the QEPS-supported schools are becoming comparable to private schools, especially for early grades (1-3). The integrated curriculum training, CAS-related training, joint monitoring by LG and QEPS staff, and regular visits by QEPS staff are cited as important contributing factors to improving the knowledge of stakeholders. Officials in one LG attributed the noticeable difference in learning outcomes, especially for grades 1-3, to the QEPS because “HTN has provided educational materials, classroom management and decoration resources (such as coloured paper and means to display materials), teacher training, and facilitated interactions between teachers and parents”. HTN (through the QEPS) is seen as the only organisation which provides large-scale ‘software’ support (capacity building) and ‘hardware’ support (such as teaching materials, furniture, computer labs). Government officials in one LG noted that “the QPES offers a more comprehensive approach, including teacher training, educational materials, classroom management, teaching demonstrations, and more. As a result, the learning achievements in QPES-supported schools are generally higher compared to others”. Politicians in another LG noted that “due to the project's interventions and our continuous efforts, the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) results in our Palika have been excellent, with almost 97.5% of students passing the SEE examination this year”. During a group discussion it was mentioned that across Solukhumbu, students secured a comparatively good pass result for the SEE (74%), while newspaper reporting put the passrate for Solukhumbu even higher at 87% with one QEPS-supported school securing a 100% pass rate.<sup>22</sup> This is higher than Nepal’s average (47.87%).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See <https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/hillary-school-attains-himalayan-heights>.

<sup>23</sup> the Evaluation Team was unable to verify the Solukhumbu-specific pass rate as Nepal’s federal reporting of SEE results does not disaggregate information according to districts.





Before the QEPS, teachers used to evaluate students' performance based solely on scheduled exams. However, after receiving CAS training (as also discussed under EQ1), teachers now assess children across different themes and sub-themes. This assessment method, which is in line with the federal government guidance, provides schools with a Students Evaluation Record Book. Teachers now evaluate students' performance by sitting together with them and updating their evaluation record books. This process allows the children to understand their strengths and areas for improvement while also receiving valuable feedback from teachers. Teachers from multiple schools explained that

*"The training provided through the program introduced a unit-wise evaluation system, which had not been implemented before. Previously, we evaluated students based on terminal, semi-annual, and annual written examinations. However, we have now shifted to assessing students' writing, listening, reading, and speaking skills for each unit. This change has allowed us to better measure the students' real learning achievements, which have shown significant improvement. Although it is challenging to quantify the progress in terms of percentage, the overall learning outcomes have noticeably improved. We also encourage students to explain themselves on certain themes or topics and demonstrate their understanding in various ways, including pictorial forms, which are then displayed on the display board. This approach has created a more interactive learning environment for the children".*

PTAs and teachers also noted that the Activity has contributed not only to increase the literacy skills of students (grade 1-3) through integrated learning approaches but also to a change in attitude and behaviour of students at school as well as home. Students are said to appear to be more disciplined; respectful to teachers, parents and even friends; attentive to do their homework; and mindful of their own appearances (e.g., with regards to their school uniforms).

The primary data therefore support the results reported by HTN/HTNZ that the QEPS is contributing to quality education outcomes in Solukhumbu. Especially when it comes to enhancing the knowledge and resources required for these outcomes, which then translates into better behaviour among stakeholders, results are clear. With regards to changes in the political/policy domain no strong evidence of positive change is found.

### **Evaluation Question 3: What are the key factors that contributed to the outputs and outcomes not being met (if there are any)**

Headline finding: There are multiple factors that constrain achieving positive outcomes, particularly related to the lack of human and financial resources faced by schools and LGs in Solukhumbu. It should be noted that these are frequently beyond the control of the Activity. Instead, they emanate from the wider implementation context in Solukhumbu and Nepal more broadly.

The policy environment, and how this is implemented, plays an important role. Several respondents indicated that staff-student ratios are too high, with sometimes more than 50 students per teacher, despite the Federal government stating this should not be higher than 1:30 in the Himalayan region.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, some basic schools have very

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<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2022) "School Education Sector Plan 2022/23-2032/32".



small classes. For instance, there are 8 teachers in Namobuddha Basic School where the total number of students is only 48 (teacher student ratio is 1:6), with the number of students in grade 3, 4 and 7 being 4, 3, and 2 respectively. Hence, the imbalance between the teacher-student ratio appears to be a major issue in maintaining quality of education. Given the geography of the Himalayan region/Solukhumbu, however, it is inevitable that some rural schools will be small while those in bigger towns will have more students per teacher.

A related aspect is that education officials at the different levels (local, provincial, and federal) reiterated that there is no systematic monitoring and supervision mechanism at the federal, provincial and local levels as there was before Nepal transitioned to a federalised governance structure. There are insufficient adequate and qualified staff at the LG to carry out proper monitoring, supervision and technical backstopping at the school level. Education officials from the LG are not always able to provide technical support to the teachers in the secondary schools by observing their classes. These education officials are also very much engaged with other responsibilities and need prioritise their time, which can limit their availability in terms of conducting monitoring and supervision of individual schools.

A major factor contributing to quality education is the effective implementation of the national curriculum framework and integrated curriculum at the school level, in addition to teachers' professional development training and application of child-centred teaching methodologies in the classroom. However, head teachers and local government officials indicated that performance assessment and management mechanisms for teachers at schools are weak, and multiple schools indicated that they do not have an effective system to incentivise teachers to adopt methods to support quality education. Implementation of the integrated curriculum is not always actively enforced. This spills over into the behavioural dimension: achieving outcomes depends a lot on the motivating individual teachers but it can be difficult for schools to retain trained teachers who might be reassigned by the LG or federal government to another school (see also the discussion on teacher retention in response to EQ2). While retention is not under the control of the QEPS, it does affect its outcomes. New teachers might not have the same skills, and teachers with skills might end up in a school where the material resources to provide quality education are not in place. The QEPS has collaborated with the CEHRD to train teachers on the integrated curriculum, but only a subset of teachers in Solukhumbu have been trained, which is understandable recognising resource constraints, but it does mean a portion of teachers remains untrained.

Moreover, PTA and SMC membership changes regularly which reduces the knowledge they have to support quality education. The effects are further exacerbated when, in some cases, there is limited interaction between parents, teachers, and the SMC and/or when they do not know what their roles vis-à-vis others are. In some schools, interaction between these three stakeholders was reported to be very good while at others there were indications that interaction was weak.

English as a language also sometimes poses challenges for students – though it is unclear how significant this problem is for grades 1-3. Classroom observations showed many 'word walls' where English words are displayed alongside their Nepali equivalent (Picture 4), and in some cases in the local Sherpa language.



Picture 4: A word wall in an ECD classroom



The biggest limiting factor, however, is a lack of human and financial resources. Funding from federal and local governments can be insufficient to hire enough (quality) teachers, and schools sometimes depend on other external funding to recruit and retain sufficient (quality) teachers. This also results in a situation whereby teachers are often teaching all periods, and as such have insufficient time to properly prepare for the next class. Inadequate physical infrastructure and materials for teaching are also some of the factors identified that limit quality education outcomes – though all stakeholder groups at the local level are clear that they are better off with the QEPS support than without.

On a more individual level, there are also constraints to achieving quality education outcomes. Students at some basic schools need to walk more than one hour to reach the school while for secondary schools the walking distance can go up to 3-4 hours, negatively affecting access to education. Some households in Solukhumbu also face economic difficulties, with boys engaging in paid work/seasonal labour such as working as a porter resulting in absenteeism. Mental health awareness is also low, and some students can get demotivated/distractive if the focus is purely on academic achievements while factors that affect their mental health, such as their home environment, are also challenging. Finally, for students with disabilities there are constraints that have to do with both the physical education environment, with the teaching/learning materials available, and with the ability of schools and teachers to identify these students and support them adequately – this is explored further down in this chapter when discussing GEDSI.

**Evaluation Question 4: To what extent is the Activity being managed effectively (systems, processes, management and governance) and efficiently (value for money)?**

Headline finding: The Activity delivers strong VfM through efficient resource use, inclusive practices, and educational impact, but effectiveness can improve with better feedback and stronger and more timely engagement with stakeholders at local level.

**Budgetary Trend and Analysis**

The Activity is jointly funded by HTNZ and MFAT, with a total budget for the five outputs of NZD 2,763,018 and NZD 500,000 in support costs meaning the total Activity costs across five years are NZD 3,263,018. HTNZ contributes 41% of the funding, while MFAT provides the remaining 59%. The total budget has remained the same since the Grant Agreement was signed, but the budget for different outputs has changed over time. For instance, output 3 has no budget revision and output 2 reduced by only 3%, but output 1 and output 5 had budget reductions of 12% and 39% respectively while output 4's budget increased by 38%. HTN indicates this change is because of COVID-19, funds needed to be allocated for alternative learning and COVID prevention materials for schools. These expenses were categorized under output 4, resulting in a significant increase in this output's budget. The budget required for these expenses was realigned in consultation with HTNZ, with adjustments made by reallocating budget from output 1 and output 5. In addition to the direct outputs, the project allocated NZD 250,000 each for in-country support costs and NZ-based support costs for 5 years period, split 41% and 59% between HTNZ and MFAT, respectively. By the end of Year 4, total expenditure on this category has been 80% of the total budget for support costs.

**Table 5: Budget-Expenditure from Year 1 to Year 5<sup>25</sup>**

Outputs	Total Revised Budget (Y1-Y5)	Total expenditure by end of year 1-4	% of revised budget spent in years 1-4
Output 1 Literacy Improvement Programme delivered in early grades (1-3)	732,047	575,353	79%
Output 2 School Based Teacher Training delivered in Grades 1-5	557,847	454,354	81%
Output 3 Teacher and Further Education support delivered through salaries and scholarships	952,357	718,808	75%
Output 4 School infrastructure & classroom supports delivered	490,120	358,728	73%
Output 5 Local community & government engagement programme delivered	30,647	22,422	73%
<b>Total Outputs</b>	<b>2,763,018</b>	<b>2,129,665</b>	<b>77%</b>
In-country support costs	250,000	200,000	80%
NZ-based support costs	250,000	200,000	80%
<b>Total in NZD</b>	<b>3,263,018</b>	<b>2,529,665</b>	<b>78%</b>

By the end of Year 4, a total of NZD 2,129,665 has been spent as specified in the table above, accounting for 77% of the total budget, which demonstrates efficiency in spending habits at the activity level, and in line with planning process. Output 1, focusing on the

<sup>25</sup> Source: QEPS Annual Financial Reports.



LIP/LIL for early grades, has spent 79% of its allocated funds, while output 2, dedicated to the SBTTP, has used 81%; For output 3, which supports Teacher and Further Education through salaries and scholarships, 75% of the budget has been spent. Similarly, 73% of the funds for both output 4, covering School infrastructure and classroom support, and output 5, which engages local communities and government, have been utilized. Overall, the program is on track, with spending across outputs ranging from 73% to 81% of the budgeted amounts. This is important from a VfM perspective because it avoids rushed spending towards the end of the Activity, which could lead to inefficient or ineffective spending.

### RAG narrative

VfM is a concept commonly used in international development and the public sector to ensure that resources are being used efficiently, effectively, and equitably to achieve the desired outcomes. The VfM framework is built around the principle of the 4 Es: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Equity. Economy focuses on acquiring good-quality resources at a reasonable cost, while Efficiency ensures that these resources are utilized to their full potential, producing measurable outputs. Effectiveness looks at how these outputs translate into the intended outcomes, creating a meaningful impact on the target population. Lastly, Equity ensures that the benefits of the project are distributed fairly and inclusively across all groups. Using the concept of VfM, the following section covers the RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating on the 4 Es, defined by a unique set of indicators specifically designed for the schools and education sector.<sup>26</sup> Each indicator has been given a rating of Difficulty (Red), Medium (Amber), or Good (Green) to describe its performance, with specific evidence collected through the document review and primary data collection.

**Table 6: VfM - Economy indicators**

Economy		
Indicators	RAG rating	Description
Co-funding within the Activity	Good	Good and coordinated collaboration on co-funding approach: The Computer Lab component under the Activity is a collaborative effort supported by various partners, contributing NPR 42,505,544 in total. EduTech Nepal provides devices and training (27%), HTNZ covers 50% of computer/equipment costs (18%), HTN/QEPS covers major expenses including salaries and transportation (34%), and schools contribute to furniture and lab setup (22%). This partnership ensures the effective establishment and maintenance of computer labs. Furthermore, the collaboration between Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural Municipality (KPLRM) and the Himalayan Trust funds a Bachelor Level Scholarship scheme for 12 students, with KPLRM covering 60% and the Himalayan Trust covering 40% supporting students' higher education.
Procurement procedures	Good	The transparent tendering process, involving local authorities and HTN staff, ensures efficient resource allocation and governance, leading to cost-effective and accountable fund use.

26 University of Southampton (2008). "Value for money in schools: Report for the Audit Office". University of Southampton Institutional repository <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/52002/>.

Decision making	Good	Frequent interactions between teachers and the SMC show improvement in trust, ownership, and collaborative decision-making, strengthening governance and stakeholder involvement to deliver better activities
Reporting and Accountability	Good	HTN and HTNZ collaborate on the QEPS progress reporting, with an education subcommittee on HTNZ's Board reviewing reports to ensure alignment with international standards and provide technical assistance. HTNZ also has a MEL partner (The Mangrove Collective) to provide support.

**Table 7: VfM - Efficiency indicators**

Efficiency		
Indicators	RAG rating	Description
Budget Variances and External Factors	Good	Budget Variances and External Factors: Variances between budgeted and actual spending often result from unforeseen circumstances such as natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. HTN has been able to adjust its programmes, accordingly, reviewing delays and aligning future budgets and activities to accommodate changes.
Technology and adaptive management	Good	Technology is being harnessed to improve education quality and streamline project resource management. Through the collaboration with EduTech students get access to computers and reference materials, emphasizing the importance of closing the gap in digital literacy. An offline education system has also been introduced. From a project management standpoint, technology played a crucial role in maintaining operations during the COVID-19 lockdown, utilizing virtual meetings and radio communication to ensure effective internal and external communication. Additionally, in some cases smart boards are utilised by schools to enhance digital learning opportunities.
Most costly processes	Good	HTN faces high operational costs due to geographic and climatic challenges, impacting transportation, resource delivery, and teacher salaries. To manage these, HTN plans activities to avoid seasonal disruptions. Despite the high demand for infrastructure, HTN prioritizes educational quality through teacher training and curriculum development, ensuring that physical resources support rather than overshadow the focus on improving educational delivery methods.
Quality of teaching staffs	Good	QEPS staff conduct regular school visits to observe classrooms, interact with teachers, and assess teaching methods. They provide feedback and demonstrate effective practices to enhance teaching quality. However, the limited number of staff and bi-monthly visits may delay continuous feedback and support, suggesting a need for improved resource allocation.
Child-friendly learning environment ensured	Good	HTN has enhanced classrooms with child-friendly furniture and materials, improving student engagement and learning outcomes. While achievement trends are improving, quantifying progress remains difficult, and the absence of quality indicators in School Improvement Plans suggests a need for better school governance. HTN also emphasizes early childhood and primary education, creating supportive learning environments and providing feedback on best practices during classroom visits.
Local community and government engagement	Medium	Local community and government engagement shows strengths in collaborative governance and capacity building through HTN's support. However, ongoing reliance on HTN for resources, due to limited local government budgets and migration/staff retention issues, highlights persistent challenges in fully developing local capacity and reducing dependence. HTN's feedback mechanisms integrate student and teacher input but challenges in the collaboration with LGs persist, for example when it comes to delays in the disbursement of scholarships by LGs. While HTN cannot be held responsible for such delays, it does point to challenges in collaborating with LGs, highlighting the need for better coordination with LGs.



**Table 8: VfM - Effectiveness indicators**

Effectiveness		
Indicator	RAG rating	Description
Pupil assessment information	Good	End-of-year assessments conducted by HTN show improved student learning achievements since implementing the QEPS, though precise progress measurement remains difficult. HTN provides essential counselling and career support, valued in regions like Solukhumbu with limited opportunities. Students stress that personal drive, proactive behaviour, and support from schools, teachers, and parents are crucial for maximizing scholarship benefits and achieving academic success.
Shared understanding of financial/operational management roles and responsibilities among staff	Medium	The SIP emphasizes aligning school activities with quality education indicators and learning targets. HTN's training for SMCs underscores effective management, but delays in annual updates and gaps in incorporating quality education indicators reveal challenges in maintaining continuity and fully integrating all components into the SIP.
Stakeholder Engagement	Medium	HTN strengthens parent and SMC involvement in the SIP through orientations that clarify roles and enhance governance. While HTN supports SIP development and prioritization, schools typically have insufficient budget to fully implement the SIP which limits the effectiveness of the support provided through the QEPS, highlighting a policy challenge related to financial resources. Moreover, interviews suggest that engagement with the entire PTA or SMC beyond the Chairs of these bodies would be appreciated, and that it would be good to capacitate these bodies once they are (newly) installed.

**Table 9: VfM - Equity indicators**

Equity		
Indicators	RAG rating	Description
Inclusive	Good	<p>The Activity is increasingly focused on GEDSI, and the resources it provides to schools and parents increase the opportunities for all to benefit from quality education. This approach reflects a commitment to inclusive practices within the overall governance and management framework of the QEPS, aiming to improve both representation and meaningful participation of marginalized groups.</p> <p>The Activity also offers merit-based scholarships that support students from diverse, low-income backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and providing crucial financial assistance. While these scholarships help students continue their education, recipients have expressed a desire for more networking opportunities and interactive sessions with HTN personnel to further support their academic and career development. Additionally, HTN's support for families has been instrumental in creating an inclusive environment that enables students to pursue their education despite financial challenges.</p>

The VfM assessment of the Activity finds effective resource use, with collaborative funding, transparent procurement, and inclusive decision-making driving efficient project management. Despite geographic and financial challenges, the focus on teacher training and classroom improvements ensures impact. The initiative is equitable, supporting scholarships and promoting gender and disability inclusion. While overall VfM is strong, improvements are needed in effectiveness, particularly in continuous feedback and community engagement to enhance implementation.



### **Evaluation Question 5: To what extent is the Activity supporting the sustainability and capacity of local partners?**

Headline finding: HTN appears to be a well-run organisation with a broad range of funding partners and activities beyond the QEPS, and it is likely to be sustainable, despite the importance of the QEPS as a flagship initiative. HTNZ supports HTN with administrative, reporting, and Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) support as well as education-specific capacity.

HTN, the local partner in this Activity, has been active in Solukhumbu since 1960, and officially registered as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Nepal since 2007. It is a (for Nepal) large NGO with approximately 40 staff based in Kathmandu and Solukhumbu. This staff group is responsible for not just the QEPS but also for other projects, for example related to health. It is supported by HTNZ, but also receives support from other organisations around the world.<sup>27</sup> The breadth of HTN's support base means that while the Activity is important for HTN, HTN is not solely dependent on it for its sustainability.

Within the context of the QEPS, HTNZ supports the capacity of HTN with support around reporting and MERL. This support has been particularly important to ensure compliance with MFAT's reporting and accountability requirements. At the end of year 1 of the Activity HTNZ also "took the decision not to continue arrangements with AfN [Action for Nepal] and focus on building the capacity of their local partner, HTN, recognising that realising the outcomes of QEPS (particularly during a COVID context) depends on effective, sustainable, high trust and long-standing relationships".<sup>28</sup>

HTNZ also has an education subcommittee which reviews reporting and provides advice to HTN. Outside the QEPS, HTNZ also funds the majority of HTN's operating costs. The Activity therefore contributes to the capacity of HTN as a local partner while its support to HTN's sustainability is less clear due to a) the existing strength and longevity of HTN, b) the diversified funding base of HTN, and c) the close relationship between HTN and HTNZ within and beyond the QEPS.

At a country-/local-level, HTN implements and delivers the QEPS largely itself and the only other NGO it works with is EduTech Nepal for the delivery of computer labs. This is not a 'capacity building' relationship as EduTech is a well-established NGO in its own right.<sup>29</sup> As such, the sustainability and capacity of local partners is not built. Instead, HTN works directly with schools and local governments, with its support primarily directed to schools, and its own presence in Solukhumbu is longstanding and sustainable. Head teachers, and the Chairs of SMCs and PTAs receive training on their roles, which contributes to their capacity. Relevant teachers receive training in teaching and assessment methods, which contributes to their capacity. However, as already mentioned, due to teacher changes, the

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27 HTN (2024), "Annual Report 2023/24, Annex 3".

28 HTNZ (2021), "Y1 Annual Progress Report", p. 13.

29 EduTech Nepal is supported by 'EduTech Nepal Foundation', a registered charity in New Zealand. The collaboration is underpinned by an MoU between HTNZ, HTN, EduTech Nepal, and EduTech Nepal Foundation.



sustainability of such efforts varies from school to school. Sustainability of outcomes is discussed further in the next EQ.

#### **Evaluation Question 6: What is the likely sustainability of the outcomes?**

Headline finding: The knowledge and skills trained teachers possess, and the behaviour they exhibit in their teaching practice are to some extent sustainable beyond the completion of the Activity. However, the effective utilisation of these skills can be undermined when schools lack the necessary means to implement the integrated curriculum and child-centred teaching practices or if teachers are transferred. Schools and local governments will not be able to continue to provide the teaching and learning materials which are currently provided by the Activity, and 'exit planning' needs to be strengthened.

The question of sustainability requires careful consideration of Nepal's context. Following Nepal's transition to a federalised governance system, the responsibility for delivering education has been devolved to LGs. The federal government contributes some resources, e.g., for federally appointed teachers, but beyond this LGs are responsible for resourcing education within their area. However, LGs have very limited means of generating revenue, and as such they are continually under resourced, both from human and financial perspective. Basic education (up to grade 8) is free and compulsory, further limiting public schools' ability to raise resources. One large secondary school visited by the evaluation team received support from 14 different organisations, and in general schools rely on multiple external sources of funding. It is not uncommon for schools in Solukhumbu to receive one-off support from people who are trekking through the region, but this is not as consistent or substantial as the support QEPS provides.

The knowledge and behaviour dimensions appear to be most sustainable, as these are less contingent on the availability of teaching and learning materials. One group of teachers remarked that "previously, our teaching skills were insufficient, but thanks to HTN for providing training, classroom demonstrations and feedback, we now have a better understanding of how to run our classes more effectively. These improvements will be continued even after the project ends". Other teachers, SMC members, and PTA members echoed similar views on what would be sustained. At the same time, the dependence on the (few) trained teachers presents a risk, with some (head) teachers arguing that "if some trained teachers are transferred to other schools, we will first request the local government to retain the current teachers. If this is not possible and transfers occur, we will then request for training for the new teachers to ensure that the quality of education is maintained". In practice, however, the reality is that LGs are unlikely to be able to meet requests to provide additional training for teachers.

From the perspective of LGs, it can be beneficial to transfer trained teachers to ensure more students get exposed to improved teaching and assessment methods. However, these teachers might not have the required resources in their new school, and the old school might not get similarly qualified teachers in return which could decrease the quality of education there.

One SMC chairperson stated that "the main challenges to ensuring sustainability are limited human and financial resources. This includes managing classrooms, providing teacher





training, and distributing educational materials to students". Poverty in Solukhumbu is high, and many parents lack the means to purchase basic materials such as notebooks or school uniforms. Likewise, schools lack the means to purchase things like coloured paper or notebooks which can serve as a reading logbook. Discussions with (head) teachers echo this by saying things like "we have limited financial resources to purchase educational materials and manage classrooms effectively. Unfortunately, this will not be sustainable from our end, but it is crucial for maintaining the quality of education. If the project closed, we would explore other institutions for its continuity" and "we have limited financial resources to purchase educational materials and classroom management, which will not be continued from our ends. But for quality education it is very important". LGs are also unlikely to step in and fund teachers in the same way the Activity's salary support does. One head teacher explained that "HTN has been providing salary to 2 teachers in our school. School doesn't have resource to retain them once the QEPS ends. I think Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural Municipality also may not be able to provide salary".

These challenges are further compounded by what seems to be a lack of understanding among schools about when the QEPS will end. The evaluation team frequently heard that schools "believe that the HTN, being in its early stages, will continue for at least a few more years" and that they "have not yet considered the end of the project and, therefore, have not planned activities after the program ends".

As such, there seems to be a lack of structured planning for the end of the QEPS whereby it is likely that soon after it ends schools will be unable to provide the required teaching and learning materials to continue quality education. The knowledge and skills among teachers appear more sustainable, but they do require maintenance. Without continued support, these human and financial constraints will eventually negatively affect/erode all long-, medium-, and short-term outcomes as these are all contingent on capacity building, retention, and material support.

#### **Evaluation Question 7: To what extent is the Activity supported by the Government of Nepal and communities where it operates?**

Headline finding: Local governments in Solukhumbu, and the communities they represent, support the QEPS and demonstrate this through co-funding. As such it is an example of where support is not only expressed verbally but also through resource contributions. The federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology is also appreciative of the QEPS as it helps ensure federal guidance is implemented at the local level, especially with regards to the CAS.

Support for the activity must also be viewed with the human and financial resource constraints faced by schools and LGs in mind. At local level, the government is very supportive of the QEPS as it provides valuable resources to a large number of schools which these governments cannot sufficiently support themselves. Some government officials also highly appreciate the clarity and transparency of HTN in administering this Activity and the fact that they work through the local government to identify schools to support – though in other LGs there seemed to be less strong coordination with the LG. Politicians in one palika remarked that

"HTN coordinated very well with the local government throughout the project cycle, including planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and review processes.



HTN submitted their annual plan and budget to the local government as part of the local government's planning process. The plan was approved by the Palika [LG] council and published in the Palika Red Book [a publication which sets out the budgets]. During implementation, HTN closely coordinated with the education section of the Palika and the schools to conduct needs assessments. Based on the Palika's recommendations, HTN provided the necessary support to the schools. Additionally, HTN invited Palika personnel for joint monitoring at least twice a year, and we also participated in these joint monitoring visits, subject to our availability".

In a different LG, HTN was requested to provide a training to *all* primary school teachers which shows that the local government recognises the value of the approach taken by HTN with the QEPS. As mentioned under EQ1 and EQ4, Khumbu Pasanglhamu RM also co-funds scholarships supported by HTN, demonstrating support for the QEPS. The MoU between HTN and Khumbu Pasanglhamu RM acknowledges the financial support from MFAT and is supported by an agreement between HTN and the municipality stipulating the roles and responsibilities of each party.

In addition, HTN, EduTech Nepal and schools which receive computer lab support have an MoU to develop, implement and maintain a high-quality computer lab to help 'transform education with technology'. These collaborations which leverage co-funding demonstrate support for the Activity from the local government and communities in which they operate. In Sotang, Mahakulung and Mapya Dudhkoshi RM the support for the LG Education Plans also highlights that HTN is seen as a valuable partner that is able to support quality education.

Respondents also indicate increased parental involvement with the education of their children as a sign of support for the Activity. This is expressed both through supporting their children to learn and making sure they attend school, and by engaging more actively with teachers and the SMC.

From a provincial level, there is little involvement, and the interviewed official was not aware of the QEPS. However, given the limited role of provincial governments in the provision of education at local level and the size of Koshi province (in which Solukhumbu is located and is 1 out of 14 districts), this is not surprising. At the federal level, however, the CEHRD which falls under the MoEST strongly supports the QEPS. They have a signed MoU<sup>30</sup> with HTN for the QEPS and they explicitly highlighted that thanks to the QEPS the CAS is being implemented in Solukhumbu. This assessment system is what HTN trains teachers in, and which looks at students' progression in listening, speaking, reading, and writing per learning unit.

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30 The MoU forms the basis for the CEHRD and other federal stakeholders, HTN, local governments, and schools to collaborate in the delivery of quality education in Solukhumbu. The MoU aims to achieving higher level of success of students in literacy and core subjects such as Nepali, English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and local curriculum-based subjects; increased students' retention through higher grades and tertiary through collaborative efforts; and increased local government ownership of education outcomes and community engagement while planning and delivering quality education programme interventions.



### **Evaluation Question 8: What is the level of public support for this Activity in New Zealand?**

Headline finding: HTNZ (and by association the QEPS) has public support in New Zealand as demonstrated by the level of all forms of public 'giving' to the organisation. The challenge will be sustaining support for the value associated with the legacy of Sir Edmund Hillary to ensure ongoing support for HTNZ's work, including the QEPS.

Based on the coherence between the aims of HTNZ and the aims of the QEPS, and the noted importance of the QEPS to the membership, the team used public support for HTNZ as a proxy for support for QEPS.

Public support for HTNZ is expressed through multiple forms of engagement including private giving, private fundraising efforts, attendance at events, paid membership, participation in annual fund-raising activities and commercial sponsorships. All of these methods are used to generate income for HTNZ, which contributes to HTNZ's co-funding of 41% for the Activity. Both HTNZ and MFAT acknowledge that QEPS, more specifically education is important to HTNZ's membership and to the New Zealand public. There is a strong association between Sir Edmund Hillary and the building of schools in the Solukhumbu region (via films, books etc).<sup>31</sup> The QEPS builds on and reinforces this association. In 2023, almost 60% of HTNZ's income came from the NZ public (including commercial firms) indicating significant support for the work on HTNZ and, by association, QEPS.<sup>32</sup>

As noted, HTNZ has strong legacy connections via Sir Edmund Hillary and his work, the challenge will be to keep its legacy narrative alive with contemporary meaning, in the minds of the NZ public – thus retaining financial support. HTNZ is in part doing this by offering a menu of engagement opportunities targeted at different demographics such as dinners, talks (for its traditional backers), and summer challenges (targeted at youth/schools)<sup>33</sup>.

### **Evaluation Question 9: What are the public diplomacy benefits for New Zealand as a result of this Activity?**

Headline finding: HTNZ offers significant untapped potential for the realisation of public diplomacy benefits which would benefit MFAT and HTNZ.

MFAT understands that investment in partnerships with New Zealand NGOs can be a vehicle for increasing the New Zealand public's understanding of the role and value of the International Development Programme and of the development outcomes achieved through government spend. This is expressed in strategic documentation, and MFAT's Strategic Foreign Policy Assessment states that "Relationships are long term and intergenerational, resting on history, culture, geography, people and shared interests and values. New Zealand highly values its relationships and will continue to invest in and build these over time".

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31 See, for example, HTNZ's Annual Reports

32 HTNZ (2023), "Annual Report".

33 MFAT (2023), "Navigating a shifting world Te whakatere i tētahi ao hurihuri", p. 11.



HTNZ has strong brand recognition in New Zealand. The HTNZ identity and brand is intimately linked with public association with Sir Edmund Hillary whose life and works are deeply embedded in New Zealand's narrative of nationhood. The brand strength was highlighted in KIIs and GDs and is supported by the ability of HTNZ to draw commercial sponsorship from flagship firms such as NZ Land Rover and the retailer Kathmandu.

QEPS is outside MFAT's main geographical focus for the International Development Cooperation programme, the Pacific, and investment is relatively small, so less resource is focused on capitalising on the potential public diplomacy, and perhaps also foreign policy/relations benefits available to MFAT.

MFAT does not require public diplomacy reporting, or acknowledgement of MFAT funding support from HTNZ but staff do recognise that its brand is strong, visible and that it has the support of the New Zealand public. However, at the same time it is recognised that while the New Zealand public supports HTNZ, they might not be very aware of the (details of the) QEPS or what role MFAT has in delivering quality education in the Solukhumbu. MFAT also recognises that there is a positive diplomatic, relational element to supporting the QEPS. It is seen as important by the Nepalese diaspora in New Zealand, and the QEPS provides a positive and long standing connection and story when it comes to diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Nepal. MFAT could consider how to leverage the public diplomacy opportunities offered through its partnership with HTNZ and the QEPS.

**Evaluation Question 10: What should be considered in any future design and delivery of the HTNZ's programming to ensure it is relevant to the needs of communities, is delivered effectively and efficiently, and is delivering sustainable outcomes?**

The preceding EQs, and the GEDSI analysis presented further below, gives rise to a number of considerations, especially relating to the design of the Activity. These are *not* concrete recommendations, but areas which HTNZ, HTN, and MFAT should consider together, given the resource implications and trade-offs they inevitably entail.

1. To support ownership of the Activity, and to ensure SMCs and PTAs can carry out their roles appropriately, it is worth considering the possibility of a) extending the provision of training to more members of these bodies rather than just the chairpersons, b) providing training to them as soon as possible when new members are installed, and c) equip the people who are trained to transfer their knowledge to others, for example through an adapted 'Training of Trainers' format or through the provision of materials that can be shared with non-trained SMC/PTA members.
2. Consider if the Activity can expand its support to schools through volunteer placements that can help schools in specific areas. EduTech Nepal is intending to roll out something similar with regards to computer teachers, and SMC members expressed interest in the QEPS adopting such an approach as well.
3. Consider whether it is sensible to expand the LIP/LIL support to cover grades 1-5 instead of 1-3. This was a frequent request from schools and the LGs, but inevitably it involves a trade-off versus the number of schools that receive support in a context of finite resources, and the high number of schools in Solukhumbu who could benefit from the QEPS support.
4. Consider how increase attention for GEDSI, including especially the disability component, can be integrated into the programming. Awareness of GEDSI, especially disability, among teachers, SMCs, and PTAs, now appears to be a blind spot, as explained in the GEDSI section further below. Consider whether it is possible to establish (perhaps in partnership) a mechanism for early diagnosis of



disabilities among children at the local level so that accessibility (in a broad sense of the word) of children with disabilities to quality education can be ensured.

5. Thought needs to be given to what 'sustainability' would mean for a future QEPS, and how this can be achieved. Schools and LGs will continue to face human and financial resource constraints, and a clearer understanding of what aspects of the Activity should be sustained 'independently' of the QEPS will also help planning for the eventual phase-out/exit of a (future) QEPS. This needs to be based on a realistic understanding of the context whereby schools and local governments will not be able to support quality education with the same level of human and financial resources that the QEPS does.

In addition, there are three further points worth considering which relate more to the domain of politics and policy. These are aspects which require government (at different levels) to take the lead, and where support from the QEPS should only be provided if appropriate. However, given their importance in achieving quality education, and the identified needs from local government in these areas, it is worth making them explicit here.

6. Consider how the Activity engages/coordinates with the LGs and whether it is worth signing comprehensive MoUs with them which cover all aspects of the Activity (and not just the scholarship component). Such an MoU should cover roles and responsibilities and could also include key steps towards increasing the sustainability of the Activity; teacher retention – for example by agreeing that trained teachers will not be transferred for an x number of years so long as this is within the control of the palika; how to organise and ensure joint monitoring *and* joint learning takes place. Setting up proper coordination mechanisms underpinned by a MoU can help reduce the diverging experiences LG officials now have when it comes to coordination with the Activity.<sup>34</sup>
7. Related, it is worth considering if the Activity can play a role in supporting the LGs to develop their education policies and plans and improve and institutionalise education-related processes, such as performance assessment and reward criteria for teachers, on what basis education resources are allocated (which now often depends on political connections), and how institutional knowledge is captured and handed over (e.g., following elections). Key to such support would be identifying realistic resource requirements (financial and human) and pathways to obtain/maintain these.
8. Consider how the Activity can support the different spheres of Nepal's government (local, provincial, federal) and schools with implementing existing policies and support/mentoring systems for teachers (including new teachers), such as peer observations in classrooms. For example, more experienced teachers could observe the teaching of more junior colleagues and provide feedback and suggestions. For this, the Activity/teachers could draw on the Teachers Mentoring Tools developed by CEHRD and which the CEHRD says can be used by NGOs. Further rolling out the Activity's Teacher Improvement Plan would also be helpful, especially when accompanied by follow-ups. For the LGs, it will be important to be supported to strengthen supervision and (joint) monitoring mechanisms, and the overall capacity of the LG education departments.

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<sup>34</sup> HTN currently signs agreements with the LGs it works in and Nepal's Social Welfare Council, a requirement for any project in Nepal. These agreements follow a set template and cover things like the budget, where the project will operate, and its key activities and outputs. However, the focus is to get approval to operate from the Social Welfare Council rather than setting out and agreeing with LGs in the manner set out in consideration #6.





**Evaluation Question 11: What are the key strengths of the Activity?**

Headline finding: the Activity's key strengths can be found across the dimensions of resources, knowledge, and behaviour. The integrated approach whereby the QEPS works with stakeholders at different levels and provides both resources and helps to build capacity are integral to the success of the Activity.

**Resources:** schools, LGs, and parents highly appreciate the material support provided through the Activity. This support ranges from stationary support and notebooks, support for school uniforms<sup>35</sup>, learning and teaching materials, and classroom materials and infrastructure to equipment likes printers, computer labs, and child-friendly furniture. These materials do not only improve access to education for low-income households, but they also contribute to the quality of education as schools cannot provide/purchase these materials themselves, and to some extent the management of the school, including unsupported classes. Provision of materials such as the Student Evaluation Record Book, developed by the CDC, is important for the delivery of quality education. The resource support is almost always needs-based, which helps to ensure the Activity utilises its funds in an efficient way.

The QEPS is also strong in leveraging resources. As discussed, it has an MoU with Khumbu Pasanglhamu RM whereby the LG provides co-funding for scholarships which recognises the contributions made by HTNZ and MFAT. The partnership with EduTech further results in additional resources beyond the Activity budget being spent on delivering quality education in QEPS schools.

**Knowledge:** stakeholders frequently praised the quality of the training provided by the QEPS, including on classroom management and how to implement the integrated curriculum and CAS. The efforts to not only train teachers but also to provide training to SMCs and PTAs was seen as very positive.

**Behaviour:** there are two aspects to this. First is the impact that QEPS has on the behaviour on others, and second the way HTN as the implementer of the QEPS behaves itself. First, the combination of resource provision and capacity building promotes better teaching. Teachers utilise their new skills and are more motivated. At the same time, students themselves are more motivated because they have nicer materials to learn with and the feedback they get from teachers is more meaningful and supportive. The SMC and PTA are also more aware of their roles, and more engaged in supporting quality education and decision-making. Parents recognise that their children get better education and are motivated to ensure their children attend and participate in school.

Second, HTN often engages closely with the LGs with one local government education officer stating that a key strength is the "strong coordination and collaboration with local government throughout the project cycle, including planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and review of project activities. [...] Active engagement of local government in joint monitoring processes". Reports produced based on these visits and

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35 The Y3 "QEPS Activity Progress Report" notes that the school uniforms provided are not funded through the QEPS but by other donors. However, in the eyes of respondents the provision of school uniforms was a part of the QEPS.



annual programme reviews with the LG also help the LG to understand how the QEPS operates and builds their own knowledge and capacity, which can benefit other schools. These actions and other coordination efforts contribute to strong rapport and relations between HTN staff delivering the QEPS and the LGs. The QEPS also conducts monitoring visits without the LG joining in. Schools really appreciate these monitoring visits as they offer an opportunity for teachers to receive feedback and for the QEPS to refresh the knowledge and skills of teachers, and it is key that these visits continue. Moreover, the MoU between CEHRD and HTN is a strength from the perspective of collaboration at the national level and system strengthening at the local level.

**Evaluation Question 12: What are 3-4 key improvements that could be made to the Activity?**

In the political/policy dimension, a key improvement relates to supporting local governments to improve coordination. Currently, there is no effective mechanism for coordination and learning at LG-level. There are many small, medium, and large partners who support individual or multiple schools, but there is limited oversight across all this support, and learning is not systematically shared among them. LGs should lead coordination efforts, but the QEPS could support and facilitate this process, particularly with an eye to institutionalising government-led coordination mechanisms and processes.

A related, but more specific improvement would be for the Activity to further institutionalise joint monitoring and supervision activities it is already pursuing. Joint visits to schools happen and are very valuable in order to maintain and improve quality education, but availability of officials from the LG remains a challenge. The Activity could work with LGs to ensure officials are able to participate in joint monitoring and supervision.

At school-level, the QEPS could help institutionalise meetings between (head) teachers, the SMC, and PTAs. Currently, there appears to be considerable difference in how often these bodies meet with it being highly dependent on the initiative of key individuals.

In terms of knowledge, the Activity could improve the timing of the orientation to PTAs and SMCs. There does not seem to be a systematic way in which new PTAs and SMCs are quickly familiarised with the QEPS and receive training on their roles and responsibilities. This can lead to members being unclear about their roles and less effective in carrying out their role. Moreover, it appears the focus now is on the Chairpersons of the PTA and SMC, rather than all members, which means knowledge and skills remain concentrated among a few individuals, which limits the effectiveness of these bodies and is detrimental to their sustainability. It is recognised that it might not be feasible to train all individual members of these bodies as they change. However, a training approach could be developed to ensure that trained members pass on their knowledge to members not directly trained by HTN.

An overarching area for improvement is to have a clear phase-out / exit strategy, which is clearly and continuously discussed with schools and the LGs from the start to the end of the Activity. Now, there is a high expectation of continued support and unawareness of when the Activity will end, and schools are not preparing/prepared for this. While schools and LGs have very limited resources to absorb resource costs themselves, even if they would plan ahead, the lack of planning for the end of the Activity needs to be improved, even if it is just to manage expectations from stakeholders who have come to depend on the Activity.



### Findings on Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion:

GEDSI is the main cross-cutting issue within this evaluation, and as set out in the Evaluation Plan it has been considered across three areas: 1) Participation, 2) Systems and Services, and 3) the Curriculum.

Headline finding: The QEPS has increased its efforts to include GEDSI into its activities since 2023. This is most visible through its efforts to raise awareness of GEDSI among its own staff and among head teachers and members of SMCs and PTAs. Furthermore, HTN has endorsed an organisational GEDSI policy. The QEPS shows dedication towards promoting GEDSI within the Activity, but further efforts can be made with regards to safeguarding and disability inclusion and clear action plan to implement GEDSI policy. Efforts have concentrated on increasing stakeholders' knowledge and to some extent HTN's own policy while the areas of resources and behavior have seen less explicit progress or attention.

### Participation

To assess participation, this evaluation has looked at school enrolment, participation in capacity building efforts, composition of SMCs, and who benefits from scholarships awarded by the Activity.

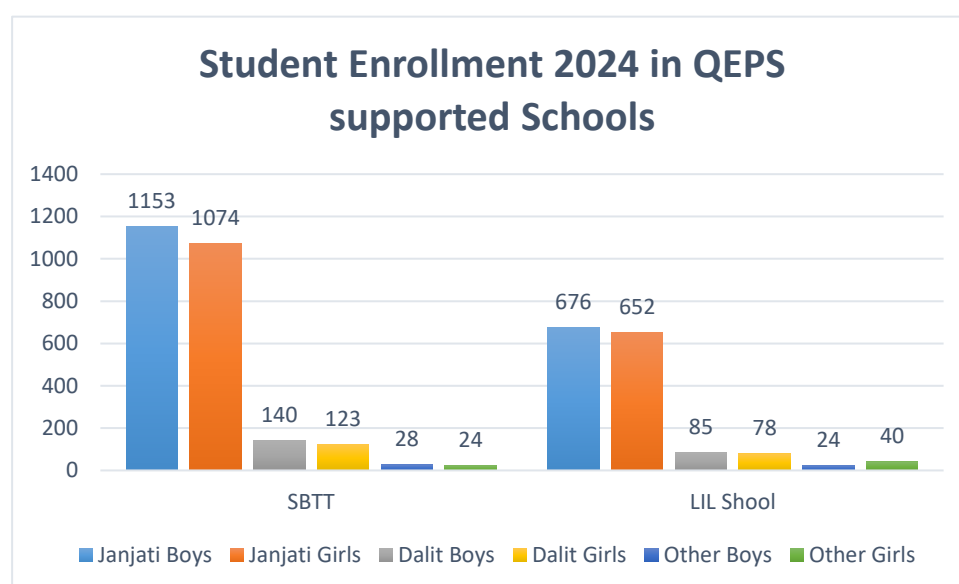
When it comes to enrolment, participation covers the 43 Schools which are supported through LIL and the 33 schools supported through SBTTP. Around 10,000 students in total benefitted from the QEPS to date. In 2024, there are approximately 4,097 students enrolled in QEPS-supported schools out of 24,011 students who are enrolled in schools in total across Solukhumbu.<sup>36</sup> Enrolment figures show a fairly equal gender distribution across boys and girls, including for disadvantaged population groups such as Janajati's and Dalit's, as seen in Figure 4. During discussions with PTAs it was stated that while a decade ago there might have been gender discrimination when it comes to enrolment, now *"in our context, there is no discrimination. All school-aged children are enrolled in schools. Nowadays, parents are aware of the importance of education and make sure to send their children to school, regardless of the cost"*.

One critical comment from teachers, however, was that especially during the trekking season some boys engage in temporary wage labour while girls continue to attend school. This was directly attributed to the poverty experienced by households and the need for boys to supplement household income.

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<sup>36</sup> Government of Nepal (2021), "Nepal Population and Housing Census 2021".



**Figure 4: Gender disaggregated enrolment data for QEPS schools<sup>37</sup>**

Qualitative primary data also support the finding that the QEPS has a positive impact on the behavioural and knowledge dimensions. The Activity has supported parents' knowledge about the value of education and that public schools, supported by QEPS, can offer quality education. This has encouraged parents to enrol their children in school and to keep them in school. One head teacher indicated that prior to the QEPS there were only five enrolled students, but that this increased to 24 following once the QEPS started supporting the school.

Across the KIIs and GDs, it becomes clear that it is a combination of increasing parents' and teachers' knowledge and providing key resources that motivates students to learn and attend school. Non-discriminatory behaviour of teachers, support for stationery and school uniforms – which can represent a real financial burden to parents, child friendly furniture and interactive teaching methods are some of the key interventions that motivates students.

One group of teachers remarked that “most of the students are from a low-income Dalit community who have difficulties in getting proper education materials and uniform support from home. The programme regularly distributes stationery and uniforms which helps parents properly educate their children”.

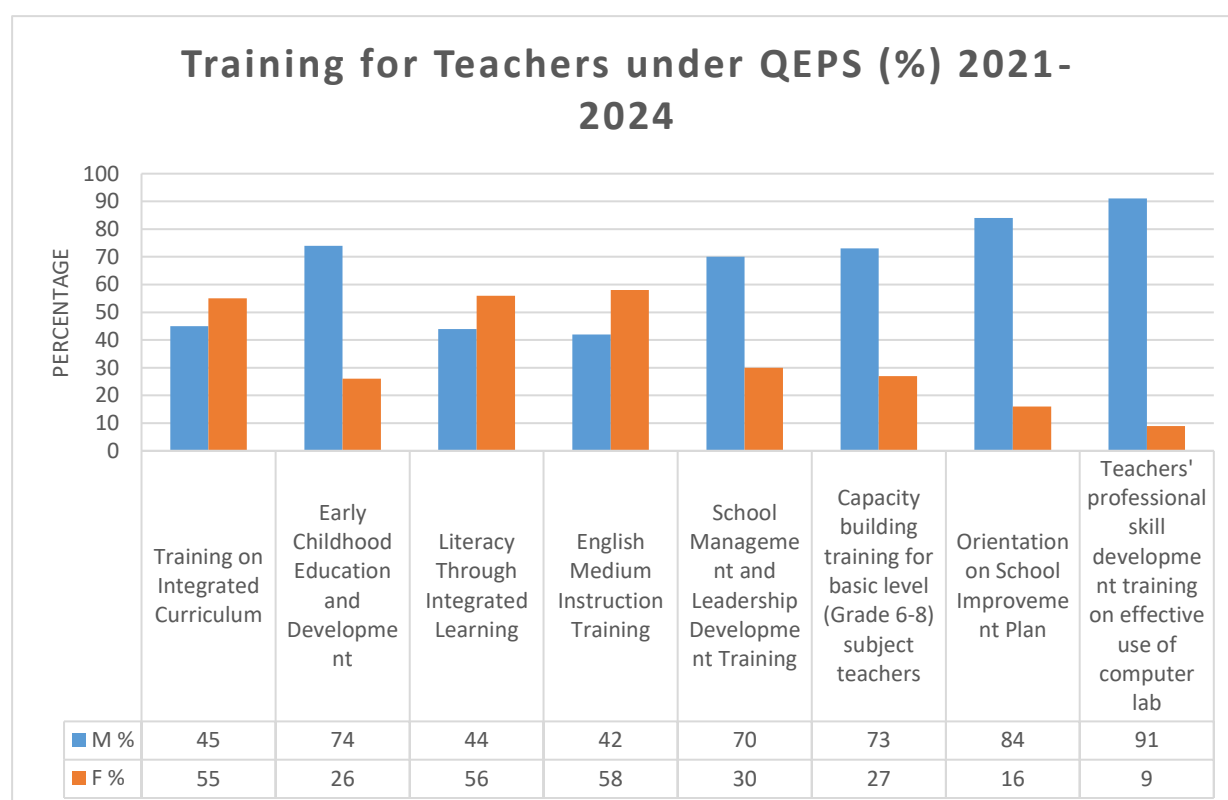
Capacity building efforts show a more diversified picture on participation across genders. The QEPS has provided training to more than 800 teachers over the course of the Activity. Both female and male teachers benefited from this training, but the share of female/male participation in trainings varied significantly across training areas, as can be seen from Figure 5. Female participation is more than 50% in the trainings on the integrated curriculum, literacy through integrated learning, and English as a medium of instruction, while in other areas male participation is (much) higher. While participation in these trainings is contingent on who is responsible for these subject areas within schools, it is concerning that such a low share of females are involved in key areas, including school

<sup>37</sup> HTN (2024), “Updated QEPS beneficiaries”.

management and the orientation on SIPs. SMCs play a vital role in developing and sustaining quality education, and it is thus crucial to increase the capacity of female school leaders. The QEPS should explore how to increase female participation in trainings where there participation is currently lagging behind.

Beyond participation in capacity building efforts, GEDSI has also been integrated into the contents of teacher training efforts. A 2024 training for head teachers, and SMC and PTA members on school management and leadership development incorporated GEDSI components. As such, while the overall gender balance in participation in trainings can be improved, the Activity is paying attention to GEDSI within its capacity building activities.

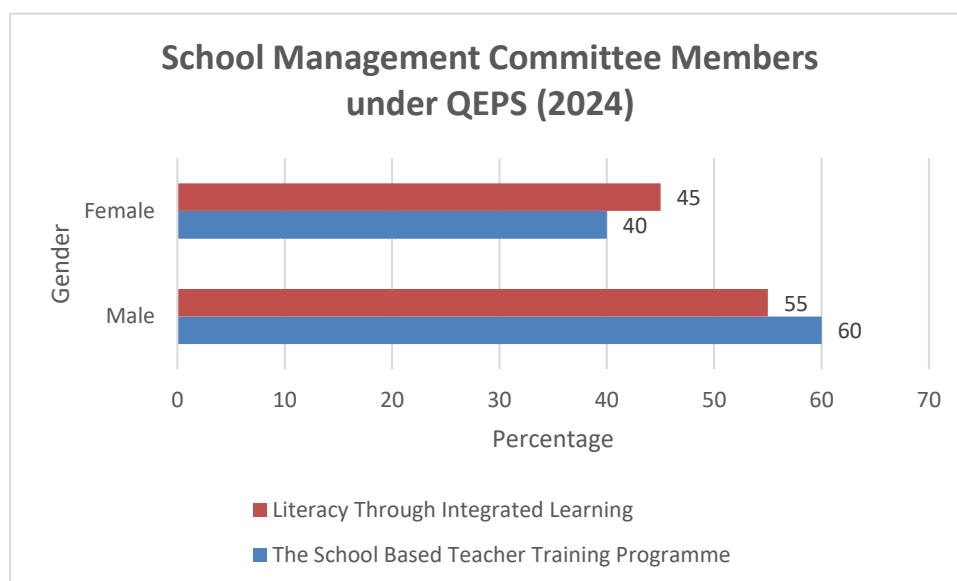
**Figure 5: Gender breakdown for participation in capacity building activities**



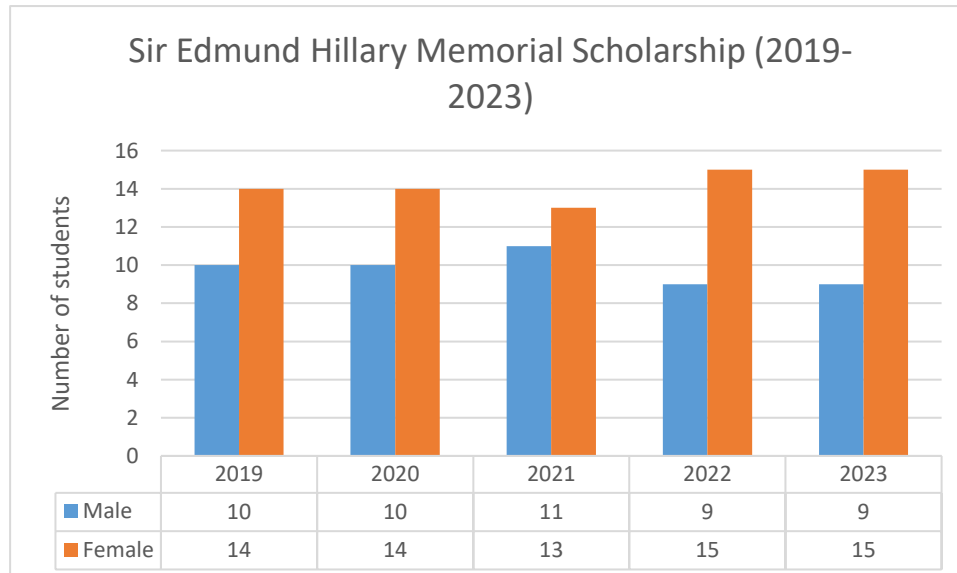
Participation in SMCs also shows a fairly balanced picture of participation of males and females (Figure 6). However, during the fieldwork it was observed that the Chairs of these committees were usually male, meaning it is also the males who benefit from training directed at the chairs of SMCs and PTAs.





**Figure 6: SMC membership by gender**

Finally, looking at scholarships, disaggregated data for the Sir Edmund Hillary Memorial Scholarship shows that girls consistently receive more scholarships than boys (Figure 7). For the Bachelor-level study scholarships the spread is balanced with 13 scholarships going to females and 14 to males.

**Figure 7: Gender disaggregated of scholarship beneficiaries**

## Systems and services: accessibility and safeguarding

When it comes to the systems and services dimension of GEDSI, the evaluation considered aspects of accessibility and safeguarding.

### i. Accessibility



There is no evidence of explicit discrimination which would limit access to education for either boys or girls. However, the document review and interviews with diverse stakeholders identified several barriers to access to education for children with disabilities.

The recent census of Nepal<sup>38</sup> shows that there are 3,290 people with a disability in Solukhumbu. Moreover, recently, a partnership between the LG, federal government, and the Karuna Foundation conducted a survey to identify school-aged children with disabilities in Solukhumbu. This survey found that there are approximately 4% (1,100) school-aged children have some level of disability. However, in most of the schools visited during the fieldwork the evaluation team was told that there were no students with disability which points to a gap in schools' ability to recognise disabilities, and hence to respond to them within their means and possibilities.

"In our community, there is no discrimination between girls and boys, and both have equal opportunities to attend school. Regarding students with disabilities, we previously believed that no such students were enrolled in the school. However, last year, the Karuna Foundation, provincial government, and local government conducted a survey to identify individuals with disabilities in the community using a prescribed questionnaire. Based on this survey, the school was able to identify 3 students with mental health issues. No special programme is run for them but has given more effort during teaching and providing proper classroom setting." [Group discussion with teachers]

People with physical disabilities face several obstacles to accessing quality education. Sometimes, these obstacles relate to the physical geography of Solukhumbu where schools are sometimes in remote locations in the hills or mountains and with poor road connectivity making them inaccessible to students with physical disabilities, especially during the monsoon or winter seasons. During one group discussion with teachers and SMC and PTA members the evaluation team was told that *"Some children must walk for over an hour to reach school. Mountain, road conditions, no transportation, rivers to cross are the limiting factors for children with disabilities"*. However, the physical infrastructure of schools is also limiting with the evaluation team observing very few schools with ramp access (despite in one case having a teacher who used a wheelchair) and not a single school with a disability friendly toilet.

Physical barriers are further amplified by social and educational barriers. Disabilities are still a source of stigma in (rural) Nepal, making parents reluctant to send children with disabilities to school. Moreover, as schools lack the required knowledge to adequately identify students with disabilities, and the resource constraints which means they lack appropriate teaching and learning resources, quality education remains challenging for this group of students. For example, during a group discussion with teachers and SMC members it was said that

*"To bring the children with disabilities into school, there is a cost association. It needs specific skills of teachers to deal with children with disabilities. Also, [we] don't know how to identify children with disabilities. Children with physical disability can be easily recognized but other categories are challenging to identify. Identification of children with disability and support mechanism is the main issues to access to education to students with disability"*.

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38 Government of Nepal (2021), "Nepal Population and Housing Census 2021".



The only evidence collected responding to the specific needs of students with disabilities was that extra attention is paid to them in class, when teachers are aware of this.

*"We have two students with mental health disabilities, but we do not have teaching materials specifically designed for them. Nevertheless, we provide focused attention during class and recognize the need to dedicate more time to their support."* (Group discussion with teachers)

*"We have one [student who] can't speak student but we have no special provision for him. We pay more attention to him in class. In addition, other pupils look after him so that he does not feel uncomfortable."* (Group discussion with teachers)

In terms of accessibility for girls, the evaluation team observed that most schools have separate toilets (10 out of 12) for girls and boys. For adolescent girls (some) schools provide sanitary pads, which are supported by the local government. This facility has made girls more comfortable to come to school and ensures they do not miss classes, as it used to be before.

## ii. Safeguarding of children

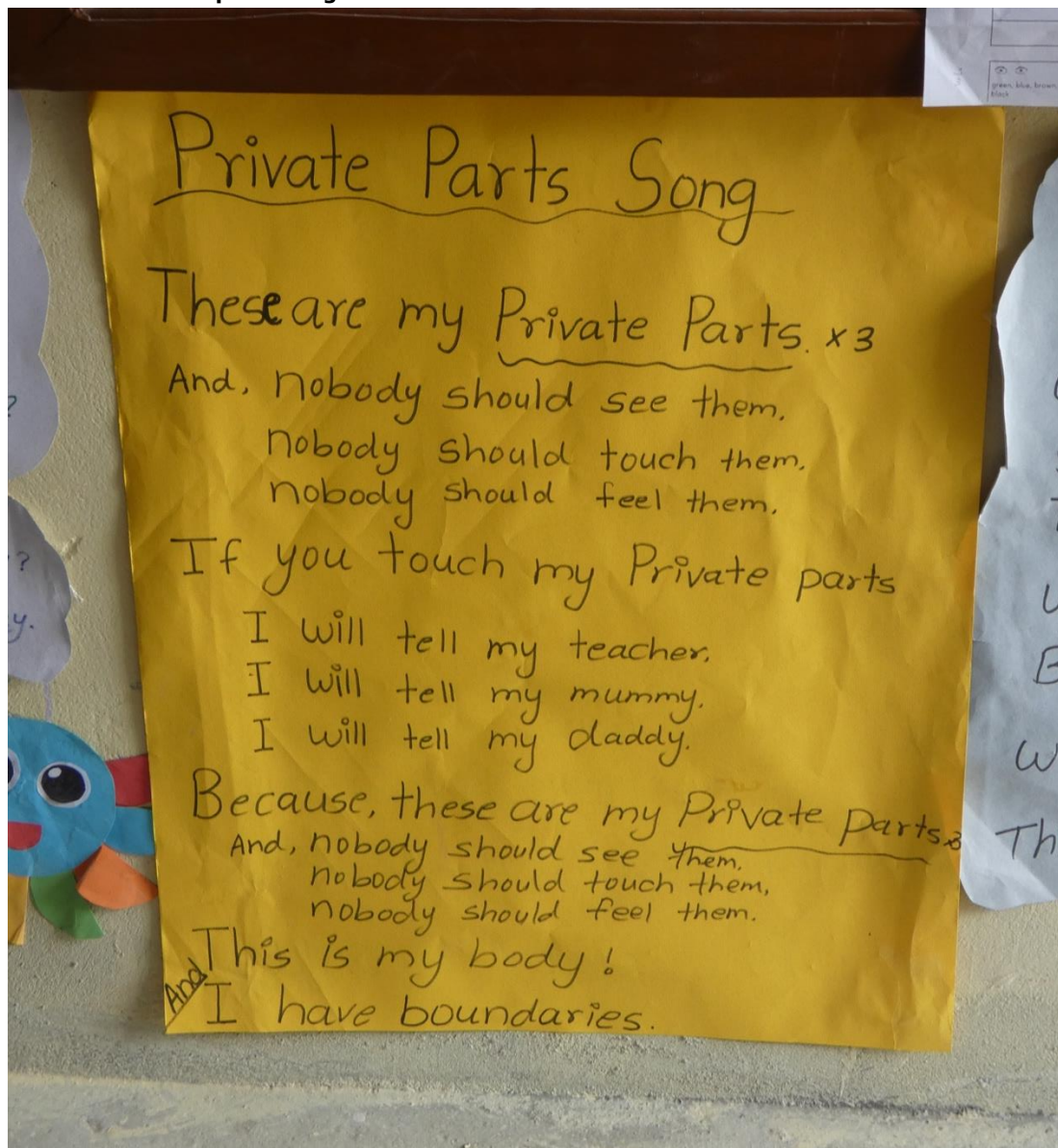
Most of the teachers expressed that their school is a safe environment and free from violence and discriminatory behaviour. However, if there are any issues, there is no confidential complaint mechanism established in schools. Some head teachers and teachers expressed that if any issues arise, students directly come to the teacher. However, this mechanism is not safe, nor does it encourage students to express any issues. Only during 2 out of 12 observations were complaint boxes identified. Moreover, there is a question about whether students are aware of what constitutes harassment or discrimination. School-level respondents indicated that there were no formal policies in place for safeguarding. Nevertheless, the QEPS GEDSI training that head teachers and SMC and PTA members received in March 2024 might help to promote safeguarding in their schools. This training briefly mentions safeguarding and child rights, but is light touch and could be further strengthened. The only concrete example of attention to safeguarding came from one school where in an ECD class students were taught a song about their private parts and boundaries, as shown below in Picture 5.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> HTN itself does have an organisational Child Protection Policy and a GEDSI Policy.



**Picture 5: Private parts song**



### **Curriculum: to what extent is GEDSI embedded in the Activity's training curriculum**

The QEPS has been increasing its emphasis on the promotion of GEDSI. In Year 3, 19 (6 F, 13 M) participants from HTN attended a two-day orientation programme on GEDSI to increase HTN's staff understanding of GEDSI. An action plan for promoting gender equality, disability, and social inclusion in education was developed".<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, in Yr4, the HTN board endorsed GEDSI policy with the aim of making its programmes more inclusive. Furthermore, in March 2024, HTN conducted sessions for head teachers, teachers, and members of the SMC and PTA to enhance their capacity and understanding of the importance of GEDSI.<sup>41</sup> In Total 109 ( 85 M/24 F) people participated in this training.

40 HTN (2003), "FINAL QEPS Activity Progress reporting Y3\_12 June 2023".

41 HTN (2024), "QEPS activity progress report Yr4 2024".

## Findings against the DAC Criteria

**Relevance:** the provision of public education in Nepal is the responsibility of local governments, which throughout Nepal are severely underfunded and lacking in human resources. Public schools in Solukhumbu are also chronically under resourced from both a human and financial perspective. Therefore, while enrolment levels are high, the quality of education in Solukhumbu is low. The QEPS is one of the few, if not only, programmes providing large-scale education support in Solukhumbu covering both 'software' (training/capacity building) and 'hardware' (resources) support. From a federal government perspective, the QEPS not only helps to address a need on the ground, but it does so in a way that promotes federal guidance - as exemplified by rolling out the CAS in supported schools. The Activity coordinates with LGs to ensure there is no duplication of support provided to schools who might also receive support from other stakeholders. It also works closely with LGs to ensure monitoring of schools takes place, which is an opportunity to provide feedback to teachers and for LG officials to learn and engage with schools. Training for school-level stakeholders (teachers, SMCs, and PTAs) is seen as being of high quality, relevant, and aligned with the teaching and learning materials that are provided by the Activity. The relevance of the Activity is further shown by its ability to attract co-funding partners for scholarships (local government) and computer labs (EduTech Nepal).

It is more difficult to establish how relevant the activity is from the perspective of New Zealand's public, and the New Zealand government's public diplomacy goals, and the evaluation team had to rely on proxy data for these questions. The New Zealand's public support for the HTNZ appears to be strong, despite the passing away of Sir Edmund Hillary, and the QEPS is the flagship programme of the HTNZ. It is, however, less clear whether the New Zealand public fully appreciate the support from MFAT, through HTNZ, to HTN. Given the long history of supporting education in Nepal, and the legacy of Sir Edmund Hillary, supporting people in Nepal is important for New Zealanders and the Nepalese diaspora in New Zealand. Moreover, the long and positive history, and the success of the QEPS, provides for a positive and long standing connection on a diplomatic level.

Therefore, there is strong evidence that the QEPS is relevant to Solukhumbu, and indirect evidence that it is important for the New Zealand public and New Zealand's public diplomacy.

**Effectiveness:** by and large, the QEPS is effective in achieving its outputs and outcomes, thereby progressing towards its goal of improved teaching and learning outcomes through quality education for all children in Solukhumbu. Presently, it has achieved 18 of its 23 outputs and 15 of its 23 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes, with only 2 medium-term outcomes falling substantially behind. Effectiveness is aided by the fact that HTN is a local NGO with strong roots in Solukhumbu meaning it has a very strong understanding of the implementation context as well as the right contacts and credibility. The combination of software (capacity / knowledge building) and hardware (provision of teaching/learning materials) is key to the effectiveness of the Activity. Training provided by the QEPS is seen as high quality and effective at improving teachers' skills, and relevant to the work of bodies like the SMC and PTA. The major challenges in achieving increased retention of teachers and schools meeting quality standards (medium-term outcomes 2 and 3), which is where the QEPS is behind on its targets, are largely beyond the Activity's control, but they do warrant further closer attention to ensure the targets are achieved by the end of the Activity. Key factors that limit the achievement of outcomes are a consequence of the wider context in Solukhumbu whereby public schools and local governments face severe human and financial resource constraints. In some schools the student:staff ratio is far too high, while in very rural schools there are very few students, and funding for schools is





based on the number of students. Moreover, there are still challenges with retaining teachers, and SMC and PTA members also regularly change which means people who have received support from the QEPS might not stay in post, undermining the effectiveness of the Activity. Overall, though, the programme is well regarded by stakeholders at local and federal level and has been effective in achieving its outcomes.

**Efficiency:** the Activity is being managed efficiently with HTN demonstrating good project management, with monitoring and reporting backstopping provided by HTNZ. It is implemented efficiently, scoring well on the Red-Amber-Green ratings for VfM across all four Es: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Equity. It delivers strong VfM through efficient resource use, inclusive practices, and educational impact, but it can improve with better feedback and stronger and more timely engagement with stakeholders at local level. Spending is on track against its budgets, which avoids inefficient spending towards the end of the Activity. The Activity scores well against the education-focused VfM framework against which it is assessed, with only three out of 14 areas where it scores medium rather than good. Two of these relate to stakeholder engagement, highlighting the need for HTN as the delivery partner for the QEPS to remain vigilant in this regard. The third area of attention relates to SIPs, which are not always updated timely or incorporating quality education indicators.

**Impact:** at this point, it is a bit early to fully establish the Activity's impact. However, as reported under Effectiveness, the Activity is making good progress towards achieving its outcomes, which in turn should translate into an impact. The QEPS' long-term outcomes are, at this point, the closest approximation of impact. Of the eight long-term outcome indicators, three have been achieved, five are showing progress, and none are substantially behind. Increasing local ownership of education outcomes is proving the most challenging impact to achieve. While LGs, schools, and parents all embrace the QEPS, timely engagement can be challenging due to changes in the composition of schools' governing bodies, coordination, and human resource challenges at with LGs. Moreover, the sustainability of the Activity remains a real challenge. Without continued financial and technical support, outcomes over the long term will be difficult to sustain, limiting the impact of the Activity. A lack of learning opportunities for stakeholders beyond the Activity further limits the potential to achieve impact beyond the scope of the Activity.

**Sustainability** is the most challenging aspect of the Activity. The implementation context means that support is provided to schools and LGs which, realistically, will not be able to mobilise the same degree of human and financial resources which the QEPS can. As such, while the knowledge increase and behavioural changes among stakeholders might be sustained for some time once the Activity ends, it cannot be expected that schools will have access to the same level of resources to support quality education. Moreover, despite these constraints which are inherent to the operating context, LGs and schools are not well aware of when the QEPS will end, expect it to continue, and consequently do not plan for a future without QEPS support. A crucial gap seems to be a concerted effort from the side of the QEPS to inform key stakeholders about when its support will end, and to support them in preparing for this, which appears to be underpinned by a lack of a shared understanding on the side of HTN, HTNZ, and MFAT what 'sustainability' means in the context of the QEPS.



## 3

## Evaluation Conclusions

### Conclusions in light of the Analytical Framework

**Social and behavioural:** the Activity has had considerable impact on the social and behavioural dynamics of stakeholders in relation to quality education in Solukhumbu. noticeable behavioural changes took place among students, teachers, SMCs, PTAs, and parents. Students are said to be more motivated and disciplined as a result of access to better learning materials and the introduction of the CAS. Computers are being used by students to look for information outside computer classes as well. Teachers have gained new pedagogical skills and are motivated to implement these using the teaching materials - a direct result of the resources and training provided by the QEPS. SMCs and PTAs appear to be more engaged - though evidence on this is more mixed and some members of these bodies have not yet received training for their roles. Parents - seeing the quality of education improving - have also become more motivated to ensure their children attend school and to, sometimes, ask questions to teachers.

**Political and policy:** SIPs have been developed in all visited schools, but knowledge of them remains mixed and plans are mostly focused on the schools' physical infrastructure, with only a few schools indicating quality education aspects are included. Challenges, however, remain with several schools not being able to comply with federal guidelines on the student:staff ratio of 1:30, which is not conducive to quality education. At the LG-level the policy environment is varied with different approaches to the content of curricula and levels of adoption of federal education acts and guidelines. A major policy-related challenge is that schools do not have the means, mechanisms, or frameworks to manage teachers based on their performance. Support from the QEPS in rolling out the CAS, developed at a federal level, has been highly appreciated at all levels. Similarly, efforts to increase joint monitoring between HTN and LG officials is seen as very positive, but human resource constraints with LGs mean that this is not always taking place as intended.

**Knowledge:** teachers reported increased knowledge on the integrated curriculum, CAS, and child-friendly teaching pedagogy. This, together with the resources provided has led to increased education outcomes across QEPS schools. Retaining knowledge within supported schools remains a challenge. Teacher turnover in QEPS schools is still higher than targeted, and when they leave / are transferred they take their knowledge with them. Similarly, SMC and PTA membership regularly changes while new members do not always receive training to carry out their roles well. This is also a risk to the sustainability of outcomes: better learning and teaching resources are less effective if teachers are not knowledgeable on how to use them.

**Resources:** resource provision in the form of teacher salary subsidies, learning and teaching materials, child-friendly furniture, computer/science lab support, and others have been vital to the achievement of outcomes by the QEPS. The QEPS continues to provide schools with resources, but schools and LGs indicate that they will not be able to absorb these costs once the Activity ends, posing a significant risk to the sustainability of outcomes on educational achievements. Child friendly furniture for example will remain in place after the QEPS ends, but schools are unlikely to be able to provide things like coloured paper, pens, and notebooks that are important for the LIL grades (1-3). The QEPS has also been

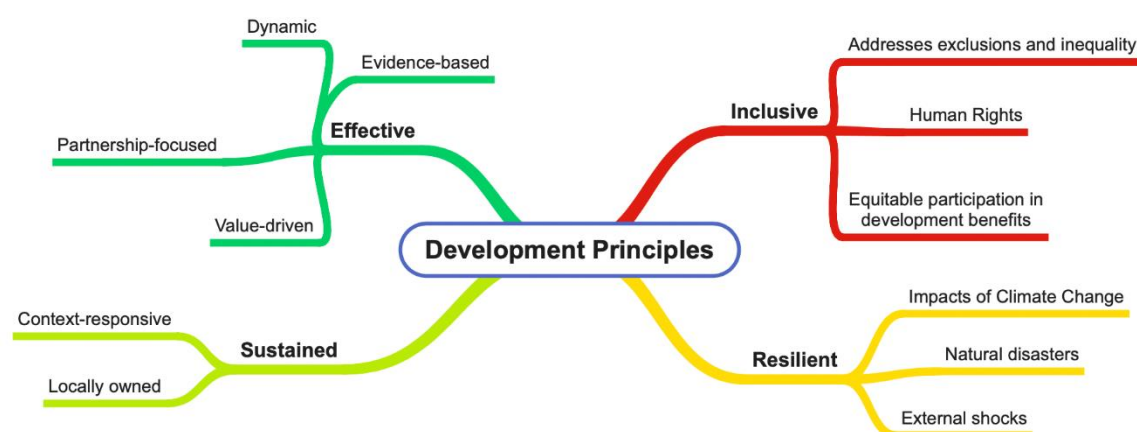


successful in leveraging its own funding through partnerships for scholarships and computer labs. Schools and LGs will also not be able to provide (refresher) training to teachers. Likewise, there will be no resources for teacher salary subsidies. As such, the limited financial and human resources pose a sustainability risk - however, it should be noted that these constraints are widespread across all public sectors in Nepal, and no silver bullets to resolve this challenge are in sight in either the education or other sectors.

## Reflections on MFAT's development criteria

MFAT's development principles, as captured in Figure 8 below, have to the extent relevant been considered throughout the evaluation, and are also implicit in the OECD-DAC criteria.

**Figure 8: MFAT's Development Principles**



The QEPS is effective in delivering its outcomes. It is being implemented by HTNZ's local partner, HTN. The historical ties between New Zealand, and in particular the HTNZ, and Solukhumbu provide a solid foundation for the delivery of the QEPS. By working with HTN and local staff it is ensured that the local context is well-understood, with dedicated education specialists both in Nepal and New Zealand involved in the Activity. The QEPS has strong monitoring systems in place to understand how the Activity is progressing against its outcome and output targets and provides evidence against this through regular reporting.

In terms of inclusiveness, the QEPS benefits boys and girls equally, and since 2023 has increased the integration of GEDSI into its curriculum. Some of the areas in which the QEPS delivers capacity building benefit men more than women. This does not appear to be due to any fault on the side of the QEPS but is likely the result of teachers engaged on those areas, such as developing SIPs and being responsible for computer labs.

Resilience against the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, and external shocks has not been explored in this evaluation as it appeared less relevant in light of the support provided and the objectives of the QEPS.

The QEPS is directly responding to the context: for example, providing teacher salary subsidies is highly relevant to Solukhumbu where teacher turnover and retention is a major



challenge; and a lack of child-friendly teaching materials and knowledge is a pervasive problem among public schools in Solukhumbu. LGs, teachers, SMCs, and PTAs feel ownership over the Activity. However, human and financial resource constraints mean that it will be very challenging for outcomes to be sustained without further support.



# 4

## Lessons Learned

HTNZ reports on Lessons Learned in a dedicated section as part of its annual progress reporting. The evaluation team has considered these and where relevant builds on these by integrating the evaluation findings, while there are also lessons identified that did not feature in annual progress reporting. The lessons are structured along the lines of the analytical framework, but often touch on multiple areas (e.g., performance management of teachers affects their behaviour but is contingent on policy).

**Politics/policy:** in its Year 2 progress report HTN observes that not all local governments have sufficient human and financial resources to effectively oversee education across. They also observe “a need for consolidated and consistent support to implement the integrated curriculum and literacy improvement plan formulated by the federal government”.<sup>42</sup> This situation continues to persist. The Activity has been providing support to LGs’ education sections, which is perceived as valuable and needs to continue, according to LGs. The lesson here is twofold. First, a careful assessment needs to be made of what an activity like the QEPS can *realistically* expect from education officers, given capacity and resource constraints, and to subsequently *prioritise* what to engage on with them (e.g., is it more important to work with education officers on overall planning/coordination of support efforts, to strengthen their capacity/knowledge (e.g., around the CAS), or to engage in joint monitoring, which is seen as particularly effective, with them)? Second is prepare for the inevitable turnover of education officers and to devise a way through which new officers can be brought up to speed with the *essentials* of the QEPS once they take up their post.

**Behaviour:** positive behaviour that supports quality education from students, teachers, and the SMC and PTA depends on a combination of training (for teachers, the SMC, and PTA) and resources (learning/teaching materials). These software and hardware components strengthen each other are more effective when combined than when delivered in isolation. However, to motivate teachers to continue to implement their (new) knowledge, it is important that there are mechanisms to incentivise teachers. Currently, however, these incentives are lacking, which means a lot comes down to the individual motivation of teachers.

**Knowledge:** the quality of training provided by the QEPS is highly regarded. By working with resource people from the CEHRD to deliver (some) of the trainings, the Activity ensures trainings are of high quality, aligned with federal guidance. This collaboration also enhances the legitimacy of the Activity and increases ownership. The lesson being that seeking official collaborations with education authorities can strengthen outcomes.

The knowledge about the QEPS itself, especially when it will end and how schools and LGs can and should prepare for this is currently insufficient. Despite details on this being discussed / written into MoUs with schools, turnover of (head) teachers and SMC and PTA members mean that this knowledge is quickly lost. Combined with an expectation from

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<sup>42</sup> HTNZ (2022), “Final QEPS Activity Progress report”, p. 12





stakeholders at the local level that the QEPS will continue means that they do not plan for an end to the Activity. The lesson is thinking about an exit strategy needs to be much more embedded – and repeated – in engagements between HTN and local stakeholders.

A third lesson is that knowledge around disabilities, especially learning disabilities, appears to be limited in schools who likely underestimate the number of students with disabilities. While the resource constraints of schools need to be recognised, and it is unrealistic to expect schools to cater to all types of physical and learning disabilities current/future students have, awareness of disability can be improved. This could help teachers to recognise (learning) disabilities and, where possible, respond to this in cost-neutral ways.

**Resources:** the Activity provides highly valued and needed resources to schools, and a key lesson is that resource provision should be based on the needs of schools. Working closely with schools on what they need (e.g., in terms of learning/teaching materials) avoids shortages/oversupply of materials ensuring efficient resource use. Moreover, HTN has been able to draw on its wider base of donors to supplement materials provided by the QEPS, for example to support school uniforms which fall outside the QEPS budget. A good lesson here is that the Activity should actively work to identify resource partners that can provide support which enhances QEPS outcomes.



# 5

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are all primarily directed to HTN as the local implementing partner for the QEPS, with the exception of two recommendations around public diplomacy which are directed towards HTNZ and MFAT. All recommendations are geared towards a possible future QEPS. Recommendations are structured around recommendations for 1) the Federal/Provincial level, LG level, school level, and the management of the Activity.

**Table 10: Evaluation recommendations**

	Recommendation	Related to	Priority
<b>Related to the Activity Design and Implementation at Federal/Provincial level</b>			
1	The Activity needs to (continue to) explore how its engagement with federal/provincial institutions (through MoUs) can enhance alignment between institutions in pursuit of quality education at the local level. An important aspect on this is providing periodic updates / learning to provincial and federal institutions as needed.	EQ 7 and 10	Medium / High
<b>Related to the Activity Design and Implementation at Local Government level</b>			
2	Ensure that work in any LG is underpinned by a MoU with that LG setting out roles, responsibilities, and expectations, including in relation to teacher retention and sustainability.	EQ 4, 6 – 7 and 10	High
3	LGs need to be supported in coordinating education stakeholders within their area, and an effective coordination and learning mechanism among stakeholders needs to be designed and implemented under the leadership of LGs. This should be led by the local government, but the QEPS can encourage and support this. <sup>43</sup>	EQ 10 and 12	High
4	Support LGs to develop <i>and</i> implement education-related policies, acts, regulations, procedures, guidelines, and plans with a focus on quality education, child-friendly learning environments, and GEDSI, where appropriate and under the leadership of local government. Areas for specific attention include: A. Support for the development of a local curriculum, as specified under the existing MoU with the CEHRD.	EQ 1, 3	High

<sup>43</sup> The evaluation team considers this to be a high priority recommendation which can contribute to enhancing quality education, even beyond QEPS-supported schools. However, it is recognised that this would expand the scope of the QEPS as it currently is, and might therefore also be considered out of scope for a future QEPS.



	B. If requested support in the development of a performance management mechanism for teachers, so teachers have the right incentives to deliver quality education.		
5	Joint monitoring between the QEPS and LGs during which implementation is monitored and teachers/schools are provided with feedback needs to be further institutionalized.	EQ 3 and 12	High
6	A co-funding approach to scholarships should be explored with all LGs in which the Activity will be implemented, building on current good practice.	EQ 1 and 4	Medium
<b>Related to the Activity Design and Implementation at School level</b>			
7	The Activity design needs to ensure that its training for SMC and PTA members reaches all members of these bodies, covering both the roles of their bodies <i>and</i> the QEPS itself.	EQ 1 – 3, 10 and 12	High
8	Related to the recommendation above, the Activity could help to institutionalise <i>regular</i> meetings between (head) teachers, the SMC, and the PTA.	EQ 1 – 3, 10 and 12	Medium
9	(further) Institutionalise the good practice of involving parents in education by maintaining a homework and reading logbook/diary, which needs to be signed by parents.	EQ 1	Medium
10	Ensure that quality education aspects are integrated into SIPs	EQ 2 and 4	High
11	Develop a mentoring system for teachers at school-level to provide less experienced teachers with feedback and suggestions. Such a system could draw on the Teachers Mentoring Tools developed by CEHRD and can help sustain a culture of continuous feedback and improvement where the Activity and LG are not able to do so.	EQ 10	High
12	Integrate GEDSI further into the Activity's training curriculum. Concrete training materials for teachers, SMCs, and PTAs on Safeguarding and GEDSI should be developed, including covering the role of schools in safeguarding and the identification of students with disabilities. The latter could include drawing on the Washington Group short set on functioning <sup>44</sup> to identify the children with disabilities under QEPS.	EQ 10 and GEDSI	High
<b>Related to the management of the Activity</b>			
13	Planning for sustainability and an exit strategy should be more structurally embedded in the Activity Design and throughout HTN's engagements with schools, LGs, and other stakeholders. This should be underpinned by a shared understanding between HTN, HTNZ, and MFAT	EQ 6, 10, and 12	High

44 <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/>

	on what 'sustainability' means within the context of QEPS.		
14	MFAT should clearly outline what its expectations are with regards to New Zealand public support for the Activity and around public diplomacy. These expectations should be proportionate and not lead to an excessive burden which could distract time and resources from the delivery of the Activity. To ensure public diplomacy activities are met, a suitable indicator needs to be incorporated in the Activity's results framework.	EQ 8 and 9	Medium
15	HTNZ should, based on the recommendation above, develop a plan on how it can support MFAT's public support and diplomacy objectives.	EQ 8 and 9	Medium
16	Explore the opportunity to work with volunteers from Nepal and/or New Zealand to support schools in specific areas for capacity building. <sup>45</sup>	EQ 10	Medium
17	HTN and HTNZ should actively map out (potential) resource partners/donors that can provide resources (financial/material) which can complement/enhance the impact of QEPS funding, for example through the provision of school uniforms. <sup>46</sup> This mapping should be accompanied with a resource mobilization plan. <sup>47</sup>	EQ 11	Medium
18	HTN's monitoring systems should be updated to capture data on disability.	GEDSI	Medium

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<sup>45</sup> The evaluation team is not recommending enlisting volunteers as teachers, as this is a very contentious matter with regards to student safeguarding, trust building/bonding, and sustainability. However, there can be benefits to supporting capacity building through volunteers, e.g., with regards to developing the skills of computer teachers.

<sup>46</sup> HTN is already doing this in some cases (e.g., with school uniforms), and the evaluation recommends they continue and expand this practice.

<sup>47</sup> The core outputs and outcomes of a future QEPS should not be contingent on raising resources from such external donors, but this should be viewed as potential complementary to/enhancement of the QEPS.



# 6

## Appendices:

### **Appendix A: Evaluation Plan**

Double click the icon to open the embedded Evaluation Plan.



Appendix\_A\_Evalu  
ation\_Plan.docx

