LAO - COVID-19 AF: Approval Memo to CEO

The application was virtually (no meeting) reviewed by: Margarita Focas Licht, Matthew Smith, Edward Davis, Alexandra Solano Rocha, Gauri Khanduja, Ana Tobar Lozano, Simon Hall, Anna-Maria Tammi, and Arijeta Blakqori-Mjekiqi.

1. **Grant Summary:** In line with the Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan, the grant will support two outcome areas: (i) support learners, educators, caregivers/parents and school communities to prevent the transmission and spread of Covid-19 in line with national public health guidance, and ensure the well-being of learners and education staff, and (ii) ensure continuity of learning through the implementation of diverse learning activities, and ensure that teachers and parents/caregivers have capacity to support remote learning taking into account equity and inclusivity. The interventions will include a mix of no-tech and low-tech activities, including TV, physical learning resources, and an online platform accessible on mobile phones. The program will print and distribute textbooks and learning materials to students in remote areas. A remedial program for children who are lagging behind will be developed and implemented, and psychosocial support extended to learners, teachers and education staff. All activities are technically under the direct responsibility of the MoES. MoES will form a GPE COVID-19 AF Implementation Committee/Project Steering Committee to be led by the Cabinet Office and the Department of Planning.

2. **Key information:**

Country: Lao PDR		
a.	Accelerated Funding Covid-19 Allocation	US$ 10M revised to US$ 7M by GPE Board on May 29, 2020
b.	Allocation Requested (100%)	US$ 9,644,366
c.	**Allocation Recommended**	US$ 7,000,000[1]
d.	Grant Agent	UNICEF
e.	Agency Fee % + US$ amount	7% and US$ 490,000
f.	Grant duration	18 months
g.	Expected Start Date	06/15/2020
h.	Expected End Date	12/31/2021

Secretariat assessment of proposal against program standards, with accompanying staff and management sign-off, is included as Annex 1. Grant Agent proposal is included as Annex 2.

3. **Recommendation: Grant is recommended for approval**

4. **Decision:**

[1] Includes US$357,488 for the cost of the grant agent to perform its roles and responsibilities.

RECOMMENDED DECISION

In line with the delegated authority granted by the Board of Directors, the GPE CEO approves the COVID-19 accelerated funding request for Lao PDR in the amount of US$ 7,000,000 plus an additional US$490,000 in agency fees to UNICEF as Grant Agent. The grant has a start date of (DATE OF CEO APPROVAL LETTER), and an end date of December 31, 2021.

The GPE CEO recognized with appreciation the leadership and commitment of the Government of Lao PDR in preparing a national response plan and grant proposal that will mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector as well as support the recovery of the education system from the crisis.

The GPE Board approved the COVID-19 funding mechanism on a first come, first served approach for the first US$ 125 million of the original US$ 225 million COVID-19 country funding window. Although the remaining US$ 100 million has been subsequently significantly increased to US$ 350 million by the Board, the demand for the COVID-19 funding mechanism still exceeds the available funds and the maximum allocation for Lao PDR is now US$ 7,000,000, lower than the initial allocation and requested amount of US$ 10,000,000.

Unless otherwise indicated by the decision language request for Report-Back, and keeping within the original budget of each component, the government and grant agent have full authority to prioritize within the approved activities of the original application, after consultation with the local education group.

Recognizing the GPE Board's intent to proceed with the COVID-19 funding on a timeline which acknowledges the COVID-19 emergency, the Government and Grant Agent are asked to move forward with implementation immediately while addressing the following points and reporting back to the Secretariat by July 7:

Request for Report-Back

1. The Grant Agent is requested to provide a revised program document (including results framework, budget and implementation plan), following consultation with the LEG and agreement by the Government. This revised program document needs to prioritize activities so as to keep within the new grant allocation and must address the requirements noted below. Upon receipt of the revised program document, the Secretariat will verify compliance with each of the requirements below, but there will be no additional grant approval issued, nor further re-assessment of the program.

    i. Activities with clear and immediate impact on the continuation and safeguarding of education for vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 crisis be prioritized over activities that provide lesser immediate value for money for this purpose.

ii. The Grant Agent is requested to include the number and percentages of beneficiary population reached for all core indicators.

The Secretariat also raises the following points of observation, which are recommendations rather than requirements:

Observations

a) Given the urgency of the crisis, GPE expects grant implementation to commence on schedule and encourages the Grant Agent to submit a cash transfer request within two weeks of approval to facilitate the timely release of funds in support of program implementation.

b) An appropriate reduction is suggested in implementation support costs given the lower overall budget.

Reporting

Please note that during the implementation period, the GPE Secretariat will require the Grant Agent to fill out a quarterly survey which will request core data on program implementation. At the end of the implementation period, the Grant Agent is expected to submit a completion report to the GPE Secretariat. Detailed information on the reporting requirement is available in the Guidelines for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding on GPE website.

Reprogramming

The Government and the Grant Agent may reprogram this grant, in consultation with the Local Education Group and where active the Education cluster, for an amount not to exceed 25% of the allocation without prior Secretariat approval but must disclose such cases to the Secretariat. For an amount of 25% or more, as well as for any extension, advance approval from the Secretariat must be sought. The process for advanced approval will be that of non-minor revisions of ESPIG which can be found here: https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/policy-education-sector-program-implementation-grants

CEO Approval:
Alice P. Albright
Chief Executive Officer
Global Partnership for Education



Date: June 15, 2020