SOLOMON ISLANDS - COVID-19 AF: Approval Memo to CEO

Review meeting participants: David Balwanz, Nilse Ryman, Daisuke Kanazawa, Simon Hall (offline), Gauri Khanduja and Anna-Maria Tammi

Review meeting date: October 14, 2020

Date of revised proposal submission: October 13, 2020

1. **Grant Summary:** Even though COVID-19 has not yet become prevalent in Solomon Islands, in view of the particular vulnerability of small islands, the country has chosen to adopt a plan to enhance preparedness and resiliency, and to program GPE funding accordingly, which is consistent with the parameters of the COVID-19 Accelerated Funding window.[1] The GPE AF aims to support Solomon Islands' COVID-19 Education System Response Scenario Planning (ESRSCP). The plan focuses on prevention, establishment of systems to minimize the impact of COVID-19 should it arrive on the islands, as well as strengthening the resilience of the education sector. After an initial closure of schools on 30 March 2020, all schools throughout the Solomon Islands resumed classes starting from 25 May 2020. The Ministry has developed four scenarios that can be used for (a) schools to re-open, (b) re-close, (c) recover, and to be (d) adaptive should there be a need to re-open and reclose schools again. There are two key areas for which rapid preparation is needed: fully inclusive student welfare and learning, for which strengthening school and community capacities has been identified as most critical to success. Thus, the proposal focuses on communication and capacity building for risk reduction and students' well-being, developing a home-based learning program for all levels, and some system-level preparedness actions. It is expected that the program will contribute to the effective preparation of the Solomon Islands' education sector to respond to COVID-19 in the event of its emergence in the country.

Country: Solomon Islands		
a.	Accelerated Funding Covid-19 Allocation	US$ 750,000
b.	Allocation Requested (100%)	US$ 750,000
c.	**Allocation Recommended**	US$ 750,000[2]
d.	Grant Agent	UNICEF
e.	Agency Fee % + US$ amount	7 % and US$ 52,500
f.	Grant duration	18 months
g.	Expected Start Date	11/01/2020
h.	Expected End Date	04/30/2022

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.

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

[1] In October 2020, after submission of the application, Solomon Islands reported three cases of COVID-19.

[2] Includes US$101,000 for the cost of the grant agent to perform its roles and responsibilities.

3. **Key points arising from Secretariat review:**

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 Solomon Islands in the amount of US$750,000 plus an additional US$52,500 in agency fees to UNICEF as Grant Agent. The grant has a start date of November 1, 2020, and an end date of 30 April 2022.

The GPE CEO recognized with appreciation the leadership and commitment of the Government of Solomon Islands 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.

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 in the first quarterly progress report:

Request for Report-Back

1. Government plans to provide paper-based learning materials for those children and families who do not have access to internet, devices or digital platforms are positively noted. To build on this attention to equity, please include in the three-monthly report an estimate of the number and share of children who are expected to be reached though the different platforms (paper-based, online) offered by the 12-week distance learning program.

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

Observations

a) Given the urgency of the crisis, grant implementation to commence on schedule and 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) We note that the distance learning program (1.4.1) is planned to be developed over February-October 2021. We encourage partners to accelerate these efforts to the extent feasible, to ensure preparedness to implement the program earlier if the need arises.

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: October 21, 2020

CEO Memo - Annex 1
Program Standards for Assessment of
COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Applications (Country Grants)
(Last updated April 2020)
The GPE Secretariat will complete this matrix to assess country applications for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding.

Program Standards: COVID-19 Accelerated Funding				**Comments**
Country:			SOLOMON ISLANDS	
Grant Agent:			UNICEF	
Date of Submission:			Request submitted to GPE Secretariat:9/30/2020	
			Secretariat Review completed: 10/19/2020	
Yes	No	N/A	**Eligibility**	
☒	☐	☐	Is the Country eligible for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding?	Yes
☒	☐	☐	Is the grant agent accredited by GPE? *Please confirm via COVID-19 FAQ list.*	Yes
☒	☐	☐	Has GA selection followed a clear and transparent process, with the process documented in the proposal?[3]	Yes. MEHRD proposed to retain the same Grant Agent (UNICEF) for the Accelerated Funding application as the ESPDG. A communication on the endorsement of the Grant Agent was circulated via email to all EDPCG members on 25 May 2020 on a no-objection basis and no objections from any EDPCG members were received.
☒	☐	☐	Has the proposal been endorsed by the Local Education Group (and the Education Cluster where relevant)?	Yes. EDPCG endorsed the application on 30 September 2020.
☒	☐	☐	Is the proposal based on a publicly available government response plan related to COVID-19, including education? The proposal should explain	Yes. The proposal is based on the COVID-19 Education System Response Scenario Planning, finalized in May 2020. It is available on the MEHRD website:

[3] If a grant agent has been selected for the 'regular' Accelerated Funding window announced in December 2019, the government can decide to maintain the same grant agent for the COVID-19 accelerated funding.

			where and how the response plan has been made publicly available (e.g., Government website, distribution to key stakeholders, etc.).	http://www.mehrd.gov.sb/images/COVID19/MEHRD_COVID-19_Education_System_Response_Plan.pdf
☒	☐	☐	Will the program become effective within one month of GPE approval, with completion within 12-18 months from the date of program effectiveness?	Yes. The program has a start date of November 1, 2020 and an implementation period of 18 months.
The section meets GPE's COVID-AF requirements: Yes ☒ No ☐				
Yes	No	N/A	**Program Design & Coordination**	
☒	☐	☐	Are proposal activities (i) supporting basic education only, (ii) within the boundary of eligible activities under this funding window (see COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Guidelines, which focus on recovery and mitigation), or, if not within the boundary, are from the government response plan and well-justified, and (iii) likely to support program objectives / progress toward expected outputs and intermediate outcomes?	(i) Most activities of this grant support system-level actions. Output 1.4 involves developing, testing, and disseminating a home-based learning program. The proposal mentions that this would cover all levels, including pre-primary and secondary. Solomon Islands had a Primary Completion Rate of 87% in 2018, the minimal support to upper secondary that is included in this program is considered acceptable. (ii) Yes. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) advised all schools in the Solomon Islands to close on 30 March 2020. Schools resumed form 3, 5, and 6 classes on Monday 27 April 2020. All schools throughout the Solomon Islands have since resumed classes starting from 25 May 2020. The Ministry has developed four scenarios that can be used for (a) schools to re-open, (b) re-closed , (c) recover, and to be (d) adaptive should there be a need to re-open and reclose schools again. There are two key areas for which rapid preparation is needed: fully inclusive student welfare and learning, for which strengthening school and community capacities is identified as most critical to success. Thus, the proposal focuses on communication and capacity building for risk reduction and students' well-being, developing a home-based learning program for all levels, and some system-level preparedness actions. These activities align with the contingency plan.

				(iii) Yes. The desired impact of the program is "Strengthened capacity of national education system and school communities to support inclusive remote learning, safety/protection and well-being of children and families, during the pandemic and beyond". Activities support reaching the intermediate outcomes. However, there are additional activities that would be necessary to ensure children's well-being during the pandemic, should it reach the country. For example, no preparatory WASH activities (e.g. sanitation / cleaning supplies for schools) are supported by this program, nor does the proposal or plan mention other funding for this. Given the cost of these activities and the greater need for communication around risk reduction at this stage, this trade-off may be appropriate.
☒	☐	☐	Does the program, to a sufficient degree, reach poor, vulnerable, or otherwise disadvantaged children, including girls, affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? *For targeted interventions, the proposal should include the targeting criteria to ensure equity (i.e., that interventions reach vulnerable populations).*	One of the two program outcomes (#2) specifically addresses vulnerable and marginalized children. Most of the grant's activities support system-level preparedness, e.g. communication around risk reduction nation-wide, developing operating procedures for GBV, and developing a home-based learning program. As mobile phones are the most available medium, SMS is expected to reach vulnerable parts of the population as well. The paper-based learning materials under activity 1.4.4. will be provided for those children and families who do not have access to internet, devices or digital platforms. MEHRD will hold consultative workshops with teachers, school leaders and school management committee members for developing the pilot plan. The workshops would enable MEHRD to identify a sample number of families and children from across provinces who do not have access to internet, devices and digital platform.

				Report-back: Government plans to provide paper-based learning materials for those children and families who do not have access to internet, devices or digital platforms are positively noted. To build on this attention to equity, please include in the three-monthly report an estimate of the number and share of children who are expected to be reached though the different platforms (paper-based, online) offered by the 12-week distance learning program.
☒	☐	☐	Does the program, to a sufficient degree, identify and address specific barriers to learning faced by girls due to COVID-19?	The application identifies that if reporting and accountability mechanisms are compromised due to limited visibility, there could be a rise in gender-based violence and child labor. Gender is a cross-cutting theme across all the outputs in this program document. Specifically, under output 1.3 it proposes strengthening referral systems and child protection identification in schools, particularly for serious cases. It proposes to ensure that providers are aware of the procedures and their responsibilities under the system, including referrals to appropriate care, protection, and support services. In addition, technical assistance will be contracted to develop a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for school communities on child protection including GBV issues, to strengthen identification, reporting, response, and referral systems in schools.
☒	☐	☐	Does the proposal identify a relevant COVID-19 response coordination mechanism(s) and confirm that the program will be represented in this mechanism?	Yes. The Government of Solomon Islands had established the Joint Oversight Committee (OSC) under the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide strategic direction on a whole-of-government response to COVID-19. In the education sector, a unit within MEHRD (N-DOC Education), leads on COVID-19 prevention and response, and will support the coordination of this program with other activities. The Education Development Partners

				Coordinating Group (EDPCG) will coordinate, review and share information on the overall implementation of the outputs of the national response plan, including those supported by GPE accelerated funding.
☒	☐	☐	Does the proposal (i) provide information on the sources of financing for COVID response and early recovery activities planned and (ii) information demonstrating that GPE funds will be complementary to government or other donor funding, including from Education Cannot Wait, where relevant?	(i) Yes. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MoEHRD) was initially allocated US$3.8 million to support the ministry's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response plan and repatriation of students overseas. In April 2020 the Solomon Islands was also hit by a cyclone, with substantial damage caused to education infrastructure and systems. This resulted in a need for already strained financial resources to be dedicated to more immediate reconstruction and cyclone response activities, with limited additional funding available for prevention or response to COVID-19 – of which there are not a few cases in the Solomon Islands. Additional funding/support is being requested from three primary agencies/partners (DFAT, UNICEF, and GPE). (ii) Yes. The proposal shows how the funding of GPE and that of others (provided for the ESSP) would be complementary. ECW is not engaged in Solomon Islands.
The section meets GPE's COVID-AF requirements: Yes ☒ No ☐				
Yes	No	N/A	**Budget**	
☒	☐	☐	Is the proposed budget (excluding agency fee) within the GPE Board approved allocation for the country? *	Yes.
☒	☐	☐	Does the submitted budget clearly outline component, activity and grant agent implementation support costs? *Estimated unit costs and quantities should be clearly indicated. (Budget can be provided in a separate document from program document, preferably in a spreadsheet format) **	Yes. The budget is presented line by line by component, sub-component and activity. In the main, unit costs are provided and appear reasonable. A significant lumpsum (US$ 192,310) is included in the budget for outputs 1.4.1-3 for pre-emptive activities for developing, and piloting potential learning resources and delivery should closure be

				required. Although these activities could be broken down further, in total the cost is not unreasonable. Note that GA support costs of US$ 101,000 (13.5% of budget) are higher than average, but justifiable given the need to support the project over 9 provinces and several hundred islands.
☒	☐	☐	Is there a clear indication of the program's sources of funding, including which parts of the program are supported by each source? *	Yes. The proposal shows how the funding of GPE and that of others would be complementary.
☒	☐	☐	Is the budget, and its assumptions, coherent with other parts of the program design? *This includes coherence between budgeted quantities and results framework output indicators where possible. **	Yes. The components and activities costed in the budget are consistent with those described in the project paper.
The section meets GPE's COVID-AF requirements: Yes ☒ No ☐				
Yes	No	N/A	**M & E and Results Framework**	
☒	☐	☐	Is the proposed M & E framework costed and likely to support effective monitoring of program implementation and results reporting?[4] Are roles and responsibilities clearly mapped? **	Yes, the M&E plan is costed. It identifies various roles and responsibilities regarding specific indicator monitoring, data collection and analysis, and other relevant activities has been specified within the M&E plan. Overall responsibility for leadership of the M&E processes and systems will be Office of Permanent Secretary and Strategic Support Unit, MEHRD in collaboration with UNICEF Solomon Islands Field Office, supported by UNICEF Pacific. The GA will directly monitor the status and progress of the activities through its institutional M&E structure
☒	☐	☐	Does the program include a complete results framework, including the key output and outcome indicators, baselines and targets and data sources? *Indicators should be disaggregated by gender where relevant.* **	Yes, the results framework includes key output and outcome indicators with baseline, targets and data sources. These will be disaggregated by gender, wherever possible.

[4] Government-led school census and EMIS activities may be disrupted because of the pandemic; the proposal should ensure available capacity and financing for data collection with this risk in mind.

☒	☐	☐	Does the proposal confirm agreement to collect and report on required core indicators (where relevant) and follow GPE M&E Guidance for COVID-19 AF Grants, including on standardized program reporting? **	Yes, the results framework includes relevant core indicators that follow GPE M&E guidance.
☒	☐	☐	Does the proposal include an activity line and budget for development and implementation of an approach to learning from evidence? *(see GPE M&E Guidance for COVID-19 Accelerated Funding Grants)* **	Yes, the program document includes a costed learning from evidence approach
The section meets GPE's COVID-AF requirements: Yes ☒ No ☐				
Yes	No	N/A	**Implementation Arrangements & Readiness**	
☒	☐	☐	Does the proposal include a sufficiently detailed implementation plan with a timeline, activities, and roles and responsibilities clearly described?	Yes, an implementation plan is included. **Observation:** We note that the distance learning program (1.4.1) is planned to be developed over February-October 2021. We encourage partners to accelerate these efforts to the extent feasible, to ensure preparedness to implement the program earlier if the need arises.
☒	☐	☐	Are implementation arrangements sufficiently well-described to identify program management structures, responsible actors and processes?	Yes. MEHRD will be responsible for implementing the program, providing overall strategic guidance and coordination on behalf of the government. The overall leadership would be provided by the Office of Permanent Secretary, Education in collaboration with Deputy Secretary and Under Secretary, Corporate Services. The provincial education authorities will play a direct role for implementing the proposed activities for schools and communities in their own provinces supported through mechanisms from MEHRD.
☒	☐	☐	Are implementation arrangements sufficiently described to determine flow of funds? *	Yes. UNICEF will be responsible for the management of funds and disbursements will be made in accordance with the requirements of UNICEF's HACT procedures.
☒	☐	☐	Are proposed financial management, auditing, and procurement arrangements clearly described and appropriate for the country context? *	Yes. UNICEF will be responsible for the management of funds UNICEF's HACT procedures, as outlined in Appendix

				1 of the proposal, will apply to fiduciary management, procurement and audit.
☐	☐	☒	Are proposed sub-contracting arrangements clearly described and appropriate?	N/A. It appears there are no sub-contracting arrangements within this program, besides transfers to MEHRD.
☒	☐	☐	Are implementation support and oversight arrangements by the grant agent well described?	Yes. UNICEF offices in Fiji and Solomon Islands will provide technical support and will be responsible for program monitoring and reporting. UNICEF staff from other relevant sections like child protection, early childhood development and WASH will provide necessary technical support. UNICEF signs annual work plans with the Government of the Solomon Islands.
☒	☐	☐	Does the proposal ensure implementation arrangements will be in place to ensure rapid start-up? Specifically, will fiduciary and administrative arrangements allow for disbursement by the proposed start date? Will major interventions will be ready to be launched by the proposed start date? *	Yes. UNICEF's established office in the Solomon Islands and existing working experience and programmes with the Education Development Partners Coordinating Group and MoEHRD facilitates readiness for implementation.
The section meets GPE's COVID-AF requirements: Yes ☒ No ☐				
Yes	No	N/A	**Risk Assessment and Mitigation**	
☒	☐	☐	Are risks / insecurity that could threaten any vulnerable population (e.g. girls, displaced children) identified, with mitigation actions proposed?[5]	Yes. The proposal mentions that children, especially girls and children with disabilities, are at increased risks of gender-based violence and sexual abuse, neglect, psychosocial and emotional stress during school closures. The program will support developing a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for school communities on child protection including GBV issues, to strengthen identification, reporting, response, and referral systems in schools.
☒	☐	☐	Are risks related to fiduciary arrangements, including financial management, procurement, governance, and safeguards issues (harm	Yes. Fiduciary risks (including procurement) are mitigated through the application of HACT procedures. As there are

[5] For example, does the proposal refer to international health and safety standards regarding school closure, or guidance on re-opening schools?

			to people or the environment) and adequate mitigation actions are identified? *	no planned civil works, it is reasonable that an environmental risk assessment does not figure in the application. Social risks, including GBV , are considered within output 1, which programmes mitigating actions.
☐	☐	☒	For grants exceeding US $5 million and the Grant Agent is an INGO: are there any significant risks regarding the capacity of the country office to perform the GA role that do not appear to be mitigated (e.g. through increased support from regional or HQ level, etc.)?	n/a
☐	☒	☐	Does the proposal trigger any GPE policies (e.g., GPE Private Sector Policy) which would require extraordinary consultation with GPE governance structures?	The Grant Agent has confirmed that no funds will be used to directly support for-profit schooling or not for profit non state providers.
The section meets GPE's COVID-AF requirements: Yes ☒ No ☐				
Please provide additional comments/details, if necessary.				

Feedback in the above templated was completed, reviewed and approved for CEO decision by the following persons, on the date indicated:

Completed by (COVID-19 Education Specialist): Anna-Maria Tammi **Date** 10/02/2020

Completed by (Risk and Finance related questions as per *): Simon Hall **Date** 10/2/2020

Completed by (M & E related questions as per **): Gauri Khanduja **Date** 10/2/2020

Reviewed by (CL): Daisuke Kanazawa **Date** 10/5/2020

Reviewed by (QA): David Balwanz **Date:**10/16/2020

Approved by (Reviewing Manager and Team Lead if <$1m): Nilse Ryman, David Balwanz **Date** 10/19/2020, 10/16/2020