Virtual Meeting of the Grant Applications Review Committee (GARC)
November 22, 2021

Reviewers: Sven Baeten (Chair)
Nilse Ryman (Regional Manager)
Muhammad Tariq Khan (Country Team Lead)
Ana Angela Tobar Lozano (Finance Reviewer)
Alvine Sangang (Peer Reviewer)
Arijeta Blakqori Mjekiqi (GARC Coordinator)

Re: BHUTAN – ESPIG – Revision

The Background from (CL assessment): Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the government closed schools in March 2020. Classes started resumption in higher grades (Grade 10-12) in September 2020 while the lower grades remained closed throughout 2020. The closure of schools impacted the National Education Assessment (NEA) schedule for Grade 3 in 2020 which was postponed till 2021. It also impacted the implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) component. The request for the extension is made to ensure that all of the NEA activities are completed. In addition, the Grant Agent has proposed to construct three new ECE centers due to the availability of additional funds in local currency.

The Request: The Grant Agent (Save the Children USA) and the government are requesting the following changes to ESPIG: i) extension of the grant closing date from March 31, 2022 to December 31, 2022; and ii) construction of additional three ECE centers.

The Grants Applications Review Committee (GARC) conducted the review of the above-mentioned request in accordance with the approved guidelines, and recommends the following decisions for approval by the Chief Technical Officer and Chief Financial Officer:

DECISION

The GPE Secretariat approves Bhutan's request for the following changes in its Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG): i) extension of the closing date from March 31, 2022 to December 31, 2022; ii) construction of additional three ECE centers due to the availability of additional funds in local currency.

Approved by CTO and CFO on December 8, 2021.

Additional Information:

- The request for the extension of nine-months in the closing date is well justified due to the COVID-19 pandemic which seriously impacted the implementation of program activities. The situation was regularly shared by the GA with the GPE Secretariat during the GA quarterly review meetings. Given that expenses for the program are mostly on track, the proposed activities and timeline for the no-cost extension seem reasonable.

- On the construction of additional three ECE centers, the proposal is well justified and will increase the scope of the current ECE interventions under the GPE ESPIG. The Grant Agent has proposed to construct three new ECE centers due to the availability of additional funds in local currency. The proposal was agreed with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the local education group (ESCM). The support to increase the coverage of ECE is aligned with the program objectives to strengthen ECCD in Bhutan, especially in rural and pari-urban areas. It is also aligned with the country's vision to increase the access and quality of ECCD programs.