Department for International Development

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Appraisal of the Operational Plan for the Zimbabwe Education Sector Strategic Plan

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Background and Approach

Department for International Development (DFID) was commissioned by the Education Coordination Group (ECG) to appraise the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2016-20 and the associated Operational Plan (OP) and Logframe.

The ESSP Appraisal was submitted to Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) on 20th March 2016. It followed the analytical framework provided in the GPE 'Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal' and was structured around the following five criteria:

1. Leadership and Participation
2. Soundness and Relevance
3. Equity, Efficiency and Learning
4. Coherence
5. Feasibility, Implementability, Monitorability

MoPSE provided a full written response to the recommendation in the ESSP Appraisal on 2nd May 2016.

When writing the ESSP Appraisal, the OP and logframe were not yet available for review. This OP and logframe appraisal report therefore complements the ESSP Appraisl and presents an overview of strengths and weaknesses of the complete package as of 3rd May 2016 (date received). Like the ESSP Appraisal, this report is structured around the five criteria listed above. It provides specific technical feedback on the OP and the Logframe. It also evaluates the extent to which comments and recommendations made in the ESSP Appraisal have been addressed in the package as a whole.

Like ESSP Appraisal, this report aims to support further development and refinement as the ESSP 2016 to 2020. The ESSP will also be an important tool for accessing investment from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and other potential donors and this report therefore also feeds into preparations for Zimbabwe's application for an extension grant from GPE (2017-20).

Findings

1. Leadership and Participation

Findings

1.1 The ESSP Appraisal report found that the ESSP is the product of a consultative process that was country-led, participatory and transparent. The OP and logframe flow directly from the ESSP and also consistently reflect same consultations.

1.2 The process of developing the OP and logframe has also been led by MoPSE with support of the ECG. As a more purely technical exercise, stakeholders have been less directly involved in the drafting of the OP and logframe as compared to the ESSP.

1.3 Like the ESSP, the process of OP and Logframe was capably supported by an external consultant procured by Unicef, who has been physically stationed with the ministry for the duration of the process.

1.4 The ESSP Appraisal recommended that the ESSP would be strengthened by including a more thorough summary of the process and consultations leading to its own generation. This recommendation was addressed.

Further Recommendations

None.

2. Soundness and Relevance

Findings

2.1 The ESSP Appraisal found that the ESSP was built upon a comprehensive and recent Education Sector Analysis (ESA) and presents a comprehensive and appropriate corpus of strategies to address the identified needs of the education system. These strategies have been comprehensively and faithfully carried across to the OP and Logframe.

2.2 Several recommendations made in the ESSP Appraisal have been addressed. There is now a comprehensive bibliography, description of the development process has been strengthened and a summary of progress against the objectives of the previous Education Medium Term Plan (EMTP) has been presented in sufficient detail.

2.3 The ESSP Appraisal recommended inclusion of a credible causal chain or 'Theory of Change' linking the activities to outputs and outputs to outcomes. This concern has been substantially addressed through the production of a comprehensive OP and logframe. The activities proposed are relevant to the realisation of the chosen outcomes. However, while the structure of the OP and Logframe are sound, both still have substantial gaps where information is missing and needs to be added.

2.4 The OP provides a detailed and extensive list of activities to be undertaken by each subsector during the first three years of implementation (2016-18). The associated indicators are appropriate and based on available information. However, the activities costing of the OP remains incomplete and it is therefore not yet possible to assess how realistic the plan is within current and anticipated resource constraints.

2.5 The funding gap analysis has been developed to include three scenarios over a three year period. This is a welcome development. It will be necessary to revisit and review these costings once the detailed costing of activities in the OP is complete.

2.6 The OP and the Sector Financing section of the ESSP only cover years 2016-18. It needs to be clarified how a mid-term review will be managed and a second OP develop covering the two final years (2019 and 2020).

Further Recommendations

1. There are numerous information gaps in the OP and Logframe to be addressed. This will be necessary in order to complete costing of the ESSP and assess how realistic and implementable it will be. In some cases the position of the persons responsible could also be clarified.
2. A stronger link is needed between the projected scenario of costs presented in Annex A of the ESSP and the costings provided in the OP. This would allow a direct read-across between the two documents.
3. It would be useful to rank activities within the OP to assist in prioritisation in the event that insufficient funds are available. These rankings could be linked to the scenarios presented in Annex A.
4. The ESSP and OP need to clarify how activity planning and costing for 2019 and 2020 will be planned and managed. These years are currently absent from the OP.

3. Equity, Efficiency, Learning

Findings

2.7 Many indicators in the OP are presented without gender disaggregated baselines and targets.

2.8 The inclusion of an equity-focused Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in the logframe at the outcome level is commendable e.g. Secondary gross enrolment in the 10 Districts with the lowest enrolment rate.

2.9 The ESSP and OP presents limited consideration of Value for Money (VfM) indicators. This might include, for example, measures of Economy (e.g. unit cost of preservice training or unit cost of books), Efficiency (e.g. value of School Improvement Grants (SIGs) as a percentage of total delivery cost of grants. The proposed key performance indicators could then be used to measure Effectiveness and inform the future targeting and equitable distribution of resources.

Recommendations

5. The interest of equity would be served by disaggregating the baseline and targets for each indicator in both ESSP and OP.
6. It is again recommended that the ESSP and OP including VfM Indicators. This will strengthen the investment case for education and demonstrate the commitment towards efficiency. A few examples are provided above. A useful model is provided by the existing VfM dashboard used by DFID and UNICEF to monitor the performance of investment in the EDF. UNICEF should share relevant sections of this document with MoPSE.

4. Coherence

Findings

4.1 Together the ESSP and OP present a coherent corpus of strategies, now elaborated in sufficient detail in the OP. Logical structure and organisation of the activities is clear.

4.2 Concerns raised in the ESSP Appraisal have now been addressed regarding the coherent handling of activities such as disaster preparedness and school funding policy, which cut across all sub-sectors.

4.3 The activities presented for Policy, Planning, Research and Statistics (PRSP) in the OP do not directly correlate with the strategies for PRSP presented in the core ESSP document.

4.4 Non-Formal Education is treated as a separate section in the OP but not in the ESSP.

4.5 School Improvement Grants are planned in the ESSP but they do not appear within the OP. This is a key omission.

Recommendations

7. Activities proposed for GPE funding on page 83 are not explicitly mapped onto the specific priorities identified in the ESSP. This would strengthen the current grant application.

8. Review the consistent treatment of PRSP activities between the ESSP and the OP. PRSP activities in the OP are not built on the strategies that are explicitly stated in the ESSP.

9. The documentation of the considerable planned expenditures on infrastructure needs to be strengthened in both ESSP and OP document. Consider adding a separate chapter or section on Infrastructure in both ESSP and OP documents.

10. Ensure consistency in the representation of NFE activities by ensuring that all activities proposed in the OP can be explicitly linked to strategies in the cores ESSP document.

11. SIGs are mentioned in the ESSP but are not adequately reflected as a strategy. This leads to the omission of mention of their delivery from the OP. SIGs are a significant strategy for promoting quality and equity.

5. Feasibility, Implementability, Monitorability

Findings

5.1 The costing of the OP is as yet incomplete. It is therefore still not possible to fully assess the feasibility and Implementability of the plan. However, it appears likely that the insufficient resources are available for all planned activities.

5.2 Across most sub-sectors the OP appears to overload 2016 with activities. This reflects a commendable urgency but may be over-optimistic.

5.3 Concerns about the allocation of indicators between output and outcome levels have largely been addressed through the Logframe. However, as already noted, concerns remain regarding the disaggregation of indicators and the inclusion of VfM indicators.

5.4 The ESSP has yet to address recommendations 24 and 25 in the ESSP Appraisal regarding a review of the risk analysis section.

5.5 The ESSP and OP does not yet address the concern of diagnosing and addressing capacity gaps in MoPSE at District, Provincial and HQ level. The analysis of capacity building needs at HQ remains largely restricted to planning and research functions. This issue is correctly recognised as a key risk to the implementation of the plan.

Recommendations

12. MoPSE should consider reviewing the distribution of activities between years. The first year of the plan may be overloaded.

13. The ESSP and OP might benefit from a more explicit consideration of the prioritisation of activities in the likely event that insufficient funds are available. Activities might be accorded a priority level, which feed directly into different financial scenarios.

14. The review of the risk matrix in response to recommendations 24 and 25 in the ESSP Appraisal remains to be effected.

15. It is again recommended that a capacity audit be undertaken at HQ, Provincial and District levels.

16. It is again recommended that the ESSP and OP set targets for increased budget allocation to non-salary expenditure, providing assurance that the sector is on a trajectory towards sustainable funding.

6. Further Observations on the structure of the ESSP and OP

Findings

6.1 The OP document would benefit from further expert input on formatting, editing and proof-reading. Some basic formatting suggestions and factual errors highlighted in section 6 of the ESSP Appraisal document remain unaddressed.

6.2 The OP includes activities relating to implementation of the new curriculum under each sub-sector programme. The document also presents a single consolidated Curriculum Implementation Plan at the end. Both are probably necessary, but care must be exercised to ensure consistency between the two parts of the document and to avoid double counting of activities in costing.

Recommendations

16. The following formatting recommendations are provided for the OP as whole:

    a. Alignment of text between columns could be improved to facilitate horizontal read across.

    b. Each activity should be given a unique identifier number.

    c. Each activity should have a clear person (or role) responsible.

    d. Column heading rows should repeat at the top of each page.

    e. There should be consistency between different programmes in the column title structure used.

f. Page numbering is missing.

g. Cost totals and subtotals should be provided under each strategy and programme to facilitate the costing of the plan as a whole. An accompanying spreadsheet will also be required.

h. Insert a page break between each programme.

17. The following specific observations are made on table contents:

Programme: Infant Subsector

a. G1S1 – 'parental contribution' should replace 'infant own cost'.

b. G2 – ZELA in included as an indicator but the annual administration of ZELA is not included as an activity. This should be addressed as annual data collection has cost implications.

c. G3 – In the initial table of indicators separate targets are needed for internal and external supervision.

d. G3S4 (and elsewhere in the document) – the deployment of additional staff will need to be accurately costed.

e. G3S5 – omit reference to temporary teachers if they are not to be used.

Junior Sub-sector

f. Primary schools will be principal recipients of SIGs yet SIG is not included as either a strategy or an activity in the junior sub-sector.

g. The numbering of goals should be reviewed and corrected.

h. Suggest that the indicators for Goal 1 be reviewed. The percentage of children with disabilities in school is a good indicator, but it is not purely a function of the presence of adequate infrastructure.

i. Activities under G1S1 are not adequately stated i.e. not SMART

j. G1S2 transport costing figures are misplaced in the activity column

k. G1S3 - unit cost of visits is needed.

l. G1S5 – no costing provided.

m. G4 – Indicator targets need to be added.

n. G5S2 – description of activities should be improved and made 'SMART'.

Secondary Sub-programme

a. Responsible officer is not recorded for most activities.
b. Costings are needed for most activities in this sub-sector.
c. G1S4 – Review spread of activities across the 3 year period.
d. G1,S8. This row has been left blank.
e. Goal 2. There is no consideration of curriculum implementation, unlike the infant and junior sub-sectors. The document needs to be consistent in its treatment of curriculum implementation activities for costing purposes.

f. Consider rephrasing G2S2. This strategy appears includes a range of actions to improve learning in science and goes beyond the 'analysis' of results stated in the phrasing of the strategy.
g. G2S2 includes both Teacher Professional Standards and establishment of Teacher Professional Council. These would appear to be two separate sizable strategies with distinct associated activities.
h. Goal 3. Consistent costing should be undertaken for training delivered including assumptions about unit cost. These should be consistent across the OP document as a whole.

Policy programmes

a. The format of this section is inconsistent with the other programmes. It includes introductory text, unlike the others. Different column headings are also employed.
b. The numbering and order of presentation of policies is different from the core ESSP document. This should be reviewed for consistency.
c. No activities or costings are provided for the development of ICT policy and ECD policy. Across this section, the definition of activities for all policy objectives needs to be improved.

PRSD Programme

a. This section lacks a main section heading
b. The description of programme does not start with an indicator summary table like the other programmes.
c. The format is inconstant with other sections. Activities described are not directly linked to stated strategies

NFE Programme

a. NFE is presented as a separate programme in the OP but not so in the ESSP. This means that there is little read across between the two documents with regard to NFE. Consider restructuring the ESSP to address this. NFE does not appear to be adequately captured in the ESSP strategies for either primary or secondary.

Curriculum Implementation

a. This section of the document meets the required standards of documentation. However there is a risk of duplication between this section and the sections presented for infant, junior and secondary subsectors. The document must be reviewed to avoid repetition.