



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN
With
LOCAL EDUCATION GROUP

SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION GRANT APPLICATION

~ THE PROGRAMME DOCUMENT ~

(Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy)

March 2024 – February 2028

Transforming Early Learning Education in BHUTAN
(Final Draft v3_13-02-2024)



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Abbreviations & Acronyms

AES	Annual Education Statistics	NGO	Non-Government Organization
AWP	Annual Work Plan	NSB	National Statistics Bureau
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
BEBP	Bhutan Education Blueprint	OPMC	Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
CA	Coordinating Agency	P5	Professional and Management Position Level 5 in the Civil Service
CIG	Curriculum Implementation Guide	PC	Partnership Compact
CO	Country Office	PCOE	Paro College of Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization	PCU	Programme Coordination Unit
DEO	Dzongkhag/District Education Officer	PforR	Programme for Results
DTA	Department of Treasury and Accounts	PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
DSE	Department of School Education	PHCB	Population and Housing Census of Bhutan
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development	PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
ECCD&SEN	ECCD and SEN Division	PISA-D	PISA for Development
EFA	Enabling Factors Analysis	PM	Programme Management
ELDS	Early Learning Development Standards	PPD	Policy and Planning Division
EMD	Education Monitoring Division	QMTEC	Quality Monitoring Tool for ECCD Centres
EMIS	Education Management Information System	QPR	Quarterly Progress Report
EMO	Education Monitoring Officer	RAA	Royal Audit Authority
ESCM	Education Sector Coordination Meeting	RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
FYP	Five Year Plan	RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
GA	Grant Agent	RUB	Royal University of Bhutan
GER	Gross Enrollment Ratio	S2, S5	Supervisory Position Level 2 and 5 in the Civil Service
GNH	Gross National Happiness	SC/SCI/SCUS	Save the Children International/US
GNHC	Gross National Happiness Commission	SCG	System Capacity Grant
GPE	Global Partnership for Education	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
HBI	Home-Based ECCD Interventions	SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
ITAP	Independent Technical Advisory Panel	SEN	Special Education Needs
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	SPD	Strategic Planning Division
LEG	Local Education Group	STG	System Transformation Grant
LG	Local Government	TEO	Thromde (Municipal) Education Officer
LSE	Life Skills Education	UN	United Nations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population
MG	Multiplier Grant	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
MoE	Ministry of Education	USD/US\$	United States Dollar
MoESD	Ministry of Education and Skills Development	VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
MoF	Ministry of Finance	WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children	WB	World bank
NEA	National Education Assessment	WFP	World Food Programme
NEP	National Education Policy	WHO	World Health Organization
NER	Net Enrollment Rate		

1. Introduction

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is currently implementing its GPE 2025 funding model. The model with its high ambitions, requires countries to elaborate plans to achieve system transformation and hardwiring gender issues in education policy making. The model also requires member countries that, to access GPE resources, they must create a Partnership Compact, identifying a policy priority to achieve system transformation, the challenges that could affect the achievement of the policy priority (enabling factors) and the proposed use of GPE resources.

Bhutan being a member of the GPE since 2008, is part of the second cohort of partner countries rolling out the GPE 2025 funding model. Under this new funding model, Bhutan is eligible for a System Transformation Grant (US\$ 5 million), Multiplier Grant (US\$ 5 million), and System Capacity Grant (US\$ 1 million).

Bhutan successfully implemented *Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant* (GPE/ESPIG) during 2018-2021 covering two components – (1) Improving access to and quality of ECCD, and (2) Enhancing national assessment system to improve learning outcomes. Bhutan also successfully completed the COVID-19 Accelerated Fund to support Bhutan's Education Sector which was impacted by COVID-19 pandemic.

Bhutan is eligible to apply for the System Transformation Grant (STG) fund. As part of this application process, a Partnership Compact was developed, outlining the specific areas of focus for the STG application. The Partnership Compact prioritized Early Learning as Policy Priority Reform Area. Bhutan's final Partnership Compact (Annexure A) was submitted to GPE in April 2023 and approved in June 2023.

This programme document is the application for the STG. But, given the systemic approach of the Partnership Compact and the anchor nature of the STG within the system transformation process, this document incorporates other activities to be implemented with other sources of financing to achieve the objectives of the Partnership Compact.

The programme document was developed in full alignment to the Partnership Compact (2023/24 – 2025/26) and the draft 13th Five Year Plan (13thFYP) of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), Save the Children International Bhutan CO (Grant Agent), and UNICEF Bhutan CO (Coordinating Agency), the document was developed with the blessings of the Local Education Group (LEG/ESCM) and the technical assistance and guidance of the Grant Application Development Team (GADT).

2. Early Learning Education Subsector – Policy Priority Reform Area

2.1. Early Learning Policy Priority for System Transformation

The Local Education Group (LEG) of Bhutan recognizes the different challenges that the education system in Bhutan faces. As such, as part of the Enabling Factors Analysis (EFA), LEG agreed that the Policy Outcomes – Gender Equality, Early Learning, and Learning – had the potential for system transformation. Two of these policy outcomes – Early Learning and Learning – are the priority reform areas for the 13th Five Year Plan (2024-2029) of the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB). In recognition of immense benefits Early Learning has to transforming the system, and as proposed by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), LEG endorsed Early Learning as the Policy Priority reform area, Partnership Compact of which was subsequently approved by the GPE in June 2023. Therefore, it is agreed that the GPE's System Transformation Grant (STG), Multiplier Grant (MG), and System Capacity Grant (SCG), along with resources from Programme for Results (PforR) of the World Bank (WB), UNICEF and Save the Children (SC) earmarked resources for early learning, and RGoB funds for covering recurrent costs, shall all be utilized to focus on Early Learning Policy Priority Reform Area as a transformative area that can produce sustainable and system-level improvements.

The **GPE/STG**, which is considered as the **Anchor Grant**, along with the above-mentioned grants/funding sources, shall be used to support achievement of the two components – (1) Enhancing access and equity and (2) Enhancing quality in ECCD services. In this programme document, the GPE STG, MG, and SCG, and other grants/funding sources from the RGoB, SCI, UNICEF, and the WB shall collectively be known as the **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy**, and where references are made to individual grants and funding sources, they shall be reflected accordingly.

After successful implementation of the proposed **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy (PCIS)**, the RGoB will have improved access to and quality of ECCD services. As a result, it is expected that the below mentioned changes will be brought to the education system, that:

1. All 3-5-year-old children, including for those children from disadvantaged groups, have access to quality ECCD programme.
2. Three-five-year-old children are physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally prepared for schooling.

These changes will contribute to realization of the four system-level aspirations stated in Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 (BEBP 2014-2024), namely: (a) **access**, which will also address the aspect of internal efficiency by reducing drop-outs among the ECCD learners in later levels of education; (2) **equity**, as universal access to ECCD services will include even the most disadvantaged areas/groups/populations; (3) **quality and learning**, as children will be more prepared for learning and teaching/learning processes; and (4) **system efficiency**, as the MoESD will be able to make more informed and evidence-based investments in education through regular/timely monitoring and evaluation. These

aspirations are fully aligned to Bhutan's commitments to SDG4 – “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote opportunities for lifelong learning”. They also correspond to the GPE 2025 Strategic Goal – “To accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems for the 21st century”.

These systemic improvements will contribute to realization of Bhutan's vision of creating “an educated and enlightened society of GNH, built and sustained on the unique values of *tha-dam-tshi ley-gyu-drey*” as stated in BEBP 2014-2024. The concept of *ley-gyu-drey* and *tha-dam-tshi* is central to the Bhutanese values. The concept of *ley-gyu-drey* essentially states that good begets good and vice versa. The idea of *tha-dam-tshi* outlines the sacred commitment to others in society.

For further understanding of the proposal, current situation of early learning and the potential impact that the early learning policy priority can have on the wider education system are considered in the following paragraphs. A simplified theory of change for the **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy (PCIS)** is also presented in the same section. (See Figure 1 below)

2.2. Evidence on the potential impact on the education system of the Early Learning Policy Priority

Investment in quality early childhood care and education programmes have been shown to have high impact in human capital development and return on investment. This is because it can lead to significant benefits for children, families and society, as the early years are a critical period of rapid human brain development. Research indicates that high quality early childhood programmes can improve children's holistic development, leading to better outcomes in the following areas, apart from laying strong foundations:

- i) **Improved academic performance:** High-quality early childhood education can improve children's cognitive, language, and literacy skills, which sets them up for success in school and beyond. For instance, 15-year-olds who attended preschools had better learning outcomes and performed better on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) than those who did not attend preschools (OECD, 2012, 2014)¹. Similarly, a study by MoE and SC (2015)² found that children who had access to ECCD centres had stronger learning and development gains and were better prepared for primary schools than those who did not have access to ECCD programmes.
- ii) **Reduced achievement gap:** Children from poorer socio-economic families often enter school at a disadvantage. Early childhood education can help to level the playing field and reduce the achievement gap between these children and their

¹ *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing, 2012 and *Indicator C2: How Do Early Childhood Education Systems Differ Around the World?* OECD Publishing, 2014.

² National ECCD Centre Program Impact Evaluation 2015. MoE & SC (p.vi)

more affluent peers. A study by MoE and SC (2015)³ found that children in rural areas learned as much from ECCD centre programming as children in urban areas despite many disadvantages and attending lower resourced centres. Other illustrative examples include as provided under (iii) and (v) below.

- iii) **Better life outcomes:** Research has shown that children who received high-quality early childhood education are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and have higher-paying jobs. For example, through quality ECCD programmes, children with disabilities or children who are at risk of developmental delays receive timely and appropriate interventions that improve their life outcomes and reduce future cost of education, medical care, and social service programmes on the government (WHO & UNICEF, 2012)⁴.
- iv) **Cost-benefit:** Investing in early childhood education can be cost-effective in the long run, as it can lead to reduced need for special education and other social services, as well as increased economic productivity. For instance, one study of a preschool programme in the US found drastic differences in life outcomes for children who participated in the programme even at the age of 40 years. The study calculated rates of return at US\$ 16 for every US dollar invested with public benefits estimated at US\$ 12.90 for every US dollar invested (Schweinhart et al., 2004).⁵ Further, in Jamaica, a 20-year follow-up study revealed that a combination of health and educational ECCD interventions increased future earnings of participants by 25 percent (Heckman et al., 2014)⁶. However, it is also true that failure to invest in ECCD has a deep and persistent negative effect on society leading to increased education expenditures due to high repetition and dropout rates; large health related spending as a result of poor health outcomes; increased social spending and welfare expenses due to higher crime rates, delinquency, unproductivity, and unemployment (Barnett, 2008; World Bank, 2011; Naudeau & Hasan, 2016)⁷.
- v) **Positive impact on society:** Investing in early childhood education can lead to a more educated, productive and prosperous society. For instance, access to quality ECCD programmes avert the many risks that children from disadvantaged backgrounds face as they are more likely to experience nutritional and developmental deficiencies, less likely to attend school or finish school, and more

³ *ibid*

⁴ Early childhood development and disability: Discussion paper. *World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund. WHO & UNICEF, 2012*

⁵ *The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40: Summary, conclusions, and frequently asked questions.* High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Schweinhart, L. J. et al (2004).

⁶ Labor Market Returns to an Early Childhood Stimulation Intervention in Jamaica. *Science*, 344(6187), 998-1001. Heckman, J., Gertler, P., Pinto, R., Zanolini, A., Vermeersch, C., Walker, S., & Grantham-McGregor, S. (2014).

⁷ In Early Childhood Care and Development in Bhutan – A Case for Investment. MoE & UNICEF, 2017 (p.7)

likely to be unemployed, involved in crime, suffer from poor health, and depend on welfare (Heckman & Masterov, 2007)⁸.

2.3. Current situation of Early Learning

Progress in Early Learning in Bhutan has been limited. Existing indicators show that the progress is very slow. Twenty years after the launch of Early Learning programme in 2003 (MoE, 2014)⁹, access to early learning by 3-5-year-old children in 2020 indicated a low coverage (MoE & UNICEF, 2020)¹⁰ at NER 23.71% (23.49% F; 23.92% M)¹¹. In 2023 (AES 2023, MoESD), a total of 13,012 (6,378 F; 6,634 M) 3-5-year-old children were enrolled in the ECCD centres out of projected 35,636¹², with a huge difference in NER (37.66% - 37.95% F; 37.38% M) and GER (54.47% - 54.17% F; 54.76% M).

As indicated above, there are no strong gender differences in ECCD. ECCD Evaluation in 2020 by MoE and UNICEF made similar observation. However, gender norms and stereotypes are still a concern.¹³ It may be highlighted that ECCD provides a unique opportunity to build strong foundations for gender equality and that gender transformative ECCD is pivotal to promoting equal rights for both boys and girls (MoE & UNICEF, 2020).

Further, the same ECCD Evaluation (MoE & UNICEF, 2020) reported that more than one child in ten had a special need of some type, which is also evidenced from the national data indicating high prevalence rate of disability among young children¹⁴. This points to the urgent need for inclusive education as well as to ensure that crèche caregivers, ECCD facilitators, health workers and primary school teachers are equipped to support the participation of children with special needs. The study noted that the provision of targeted professional development required urgent investment. Furthermore, the recent *Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan Report* (SCI, 2023) noted that “none of the ECCD centres in the study site were disability-friendly nor were the facilitators trained on inclusivity” (p.12). Nonetheless, there are three pilot inclusive centres, one being located within Changangkha Middle Secondary School, that might serve as models for future centres to enroll children with disabilities, including building capacity of the facilitators.

The current situation of low ECCD coverage, could largely be attributed to a conservative planning process. This seems to be further aggravated by lack of adequate understanding of ECCD and its benefits among various levels of stakeholders. ECCD was first initiated during the 9th FYP (2002-2007; GNHC, 2001), which provided for piloting of support

⁸ The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 29(3), 446-493. Heckman, J. J., & Masterov, D. V. (2007).

⁹ Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 (p.17)

¹⁰ An Evaluation of ECCD in Bhutan 2020, MoE & UNICEF Bhutan CO.

¹¹ AES 2020.

¹² NSB projection based on PHCB 2017.

¹³ Any major studies on gender in Bhutan makes references to this, such as by *Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors* by ADB in partnership with NCWC and UN Bhutan CO in 2014.

¹⁴ 2016 GNHC’s vulnerability baseline assessment identified children with disabilities as a vulnerable group.

mechanisms for ECCD. It focused on strengthening awareness to improve childrearing practices. Focus during the 10th FYP (2008-2012) was on putting in place appropriately skilled core group of officials and teachers, regulating private provision, and drafting policy guidelines for support of ECCD.

It is only during the 11th FYP (2013-2018; GNHC, 2013) that increasing enrolment to 10% and centre numbers from 96 to 300 were set as targets. Enrolment achievement during 11th FYP nearly doubled its 10% target. The driving forces for its exceeding achievement, perhaps have been two major initiatives – the implementation of Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 (MoE, 2014) and the launch of the Bhutan ECCD Investment Case (MoE & UNICEF, 2017).

However, with only 37.66% coverage as of 2023, 12th FYP (2018-2023; GNHC, 2019) target of achieving 50% enrolment seem unlikely, in spite of GPE project support for ECCD, for instance. While COVID-19 pandemic would have played a role, the situation is also apparently aggravated by inadequate support for human and financial resources. For instance, a significant number of newly built ECCD centres across the country could not be operationalized on time for want of facilitators.

A comprehensive ECCD plan with adequate strategies is not part of the 12th FYP; neither has it been during the previous plan periods. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ECCD evaluation report (MoE & UNICEF, 2020) should find that there was a lack of a common understanding of ECCD and its benefits among stakeholders, as well as gaps in planning, implementation, budgeting, and coordination. This primarily has resulted in the lack of enabling environment, including inadequate human (both in numbers and competencies), material, and financial resources (MoE & UNICEF, 2020).¹⁵ Similar findings have been reported in the *Assessment of the ECCD Centres in Bhutan* (SCI, Nov. 2023). The challenges are nothing less than systemic.

Nonetheless, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) is poised to bringing about a drastic change to this situation. Recognizing the significance of the programme both in enhancing the quality of education and strengthening human capital, the RGoB aspires to provide universal access to quality ECCD services for all children aged 3-5 years during the 13th Five Year Plan (2024-2029). In the proposed 13th Five Year Plan¹⁶, ECCD is identified as one of the most important Key Result Areas under the Social Cluster. The ECCD Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the draft 13th Five Year Plan has set the target of achieving 100 percent access to quality ECCD by 2029. This would result in Bhutan achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 – *'all children have access to quality early childhood development and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education,'* one year ahead of the UN target of 2030.

The prioritization of Early Learning education subsector during the 13th Five Year Plan is proposed to be comprehensively addressed. The efforts shall include – strategies for

¹⁵ An Evaluation of ECCD in Bhutan 2020, MoE & UNICEF Bhutan CO.

¹⁶ Long-Term Plan and 13th Plan, RGoB, December 2, 2022 (PPT)

expanded access, defining quality of ECCD centres, including through provision of quality curriculum and learning, qualified and competent teachers/facilitators, creation of enabling environment, provision of support for effective delivery of ECCD services, provision of adequate financial resources, etc. The Government's commitment to strengthening the ECCD programme in the country has the potential to bring about system transformation in the ECCD subsector.

To reiterate, provision of high-quality early childhood programmes can improve children's holistic development, leading to better outcomes bringing about system transformation in the early learning subsector. This transformation is bound to build pressure on the school system to transform, leading to system transformation in the school system. This will lead to better outcomes in the school system, higher/tertiary education, and beyond, the society at large.

Theory of Change:

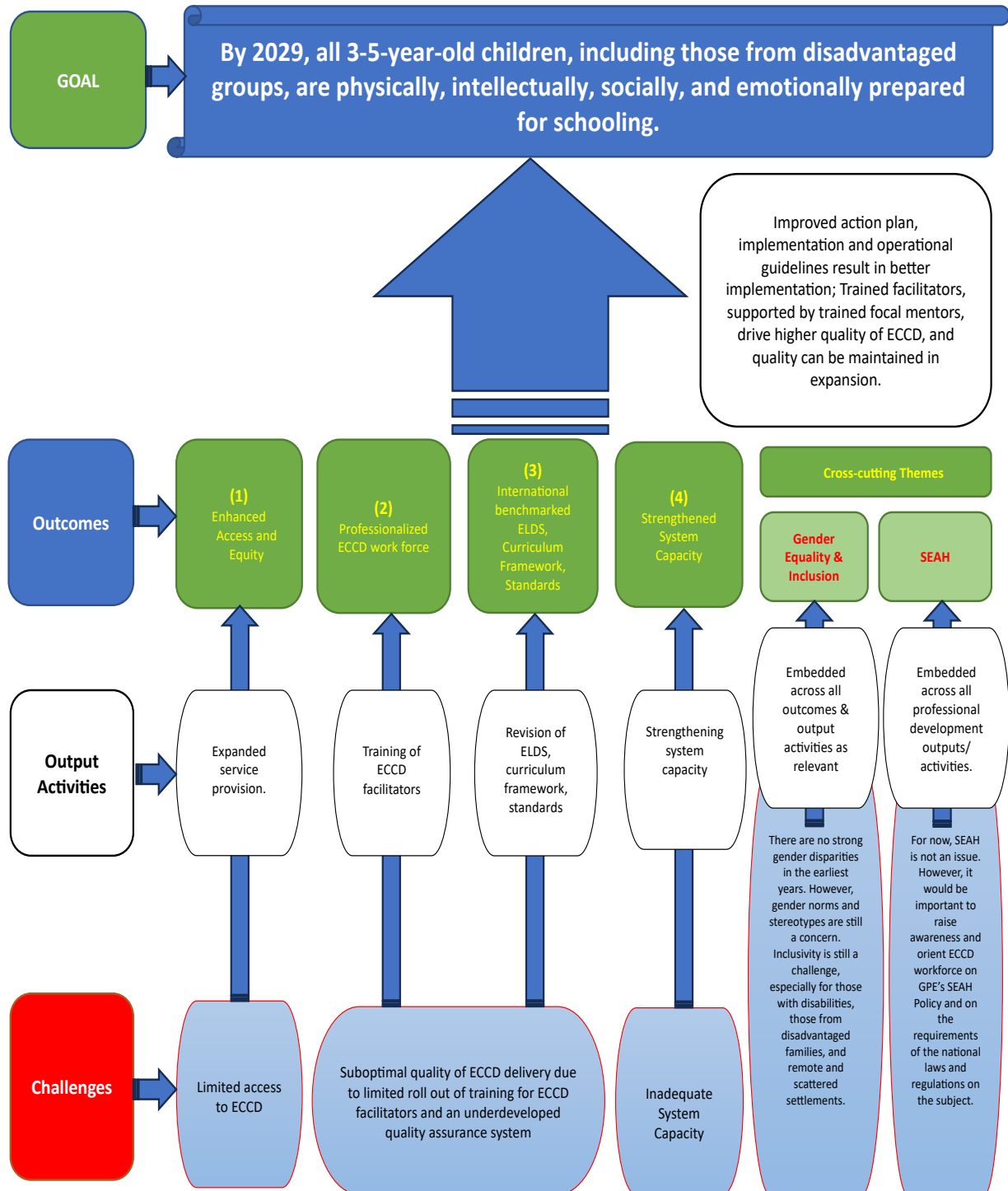
As mentioned above, the ECCD evaluation in 2020 (MoE & UNICEF)¹⁷ found that generally there was a lack of a common understanding of ECCD and its benefits among stakeholders, as well as gaps in planning, implementation, budgeting, and coordination. This primarily has resulted in the lack of enabling environment, including inadequacies in human resources, both in numbers and competencies, and material and financial resources. The achievement of the policy priority reform area will be determined largely to the extent that these challenges are addressed.

The Royal Government of Bhutan aspires to provide universal access to ECCD services for all children aged 3-5 years during the 13th Five Year Plan (2024-2029). The Education Sector Outcome states that “By 2029, all children between 3-5 years have access to Early Childhood Care and Development”. The support to implementation of 13th FYP, in particular the Social Cluster KPI 4 corresponds to the key result area – Expanded access and professionalization of ECCD (early learning) of the **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy**. (See Figure 1 below)

The **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy (PCIS)** for the early learning policy priority reform area aims to support the 13th FYP goal of providing universal access to quality ECCD services. This includes targeting the urban poor and rural and remote areas, thus, making access to quality ECCD services more equitable, including by gender and for children with disabilities. The PCIS will also improve quality by professionalizing the ECCD facilitators/teachers, focal monitors, and programme managers; revision of ELDS, curriculum framework, and standards benchmarked to international standards; and strengthening system capacity and the quality assurance system. As an overall objective, expanded and improved ECCD services will lead to measurable improvements in child development outcomes and their transition to school education.

¹⁷ An Evaluation of ECCD in Bhutan 2020, MoE & UNICEF Bhutan CO.

Figure 1: Theory of change



3. Programme Design

3.1. Programme Objectives

The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) aspires to provide universal access to ECCD services for all children aged 3-5 years during the 13th Five Year Plan (2024-2029). Specifically, the stated target of the RGoB during the 13th FYP, under Social Cluster Key Performance Indicator is –

“By 2029, all children between 3-5 years have access to Early Childhood Care and Development”.

(Social Cluster KPI 4)

In adopting the Partnership Compact for transforming the Early Learning subsector, the Local Education Group (LEG) members representing MoESD, MoF, GPE, Asian Development Bank, SCI, UNICEF, UNFPA, WB, WFP, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Helvetas, UNESCO Delhi, RUB, Bhutan Canada Foundation, Youth Development Fund, Ability Bhutan Society, Tarayana Foundation, Thimphu Education Offices, Teachers from Thimphu schools, and ECCD facilitator representative, committed to support the Early Learning Policy Priority Reform as described in the Partnership Compact (Annexure A).

The commitment includes financial support from the LEG members as indicated in the Table 1 below:

Table 1: Financial support from LEG members

LEG Member	Grant	Amount (US\$ in million)	Remarks
1) Global Partnership for Education (GPE)	System Capacity Grant	1.0	Grant Agent - UNICEF
	Multiplier Grant	3.3	Grant Agent - World Bank
	System Transformation Grant	5.0	Grant Agent - Save the Children US
2) Save the Children Bhutan CO (SCI)	Regular programme	1.627	Through regular programme
3) UNICEF Bhutan CO	Regular programme	5.285	2 AWP (2023/24 to 2025/26)
4) World Bank (WB)	Programme for Results (PforR)	4.0	Of US\$ 10.0 m under PforR; ECCD shall accrue some benefit from remaining US\$ 6.0 m
5) Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB)	Through its 13 th FYP	44.111	Largely recurrent in terms of staff salaries, & supplies & maintenance during 13 th FYP

The overall objective of the GPE's STG, SCG, and MG; earmarked resources for Early Learning from WB's Programme for Result (PforR), UNICEF's AWP, SCI, and RGoB funding is to support achievement of the above stated target of universal access to quality ECCD services of the RGoB during the 13th FYP.

The specific objectives of the collective efforts, in true spirit of the Partnership Compact, are to contribute towards:

- 1) Universalization of access with equity to ECCD services by 2029.
- 2) Professionalization of ECCD services.
- 3) Strengthened ELDS, curriculum framework, standards, guidelines, and learning resources.
- 4) Strengthened health and wellbeing for children in early learning.
- 5) Enhanced gender equality and inclusion in the ECCD programme.
- 6) Enhanced system capacity to support early learning.

The fulfilment of the above specific objectives shall result in, that:

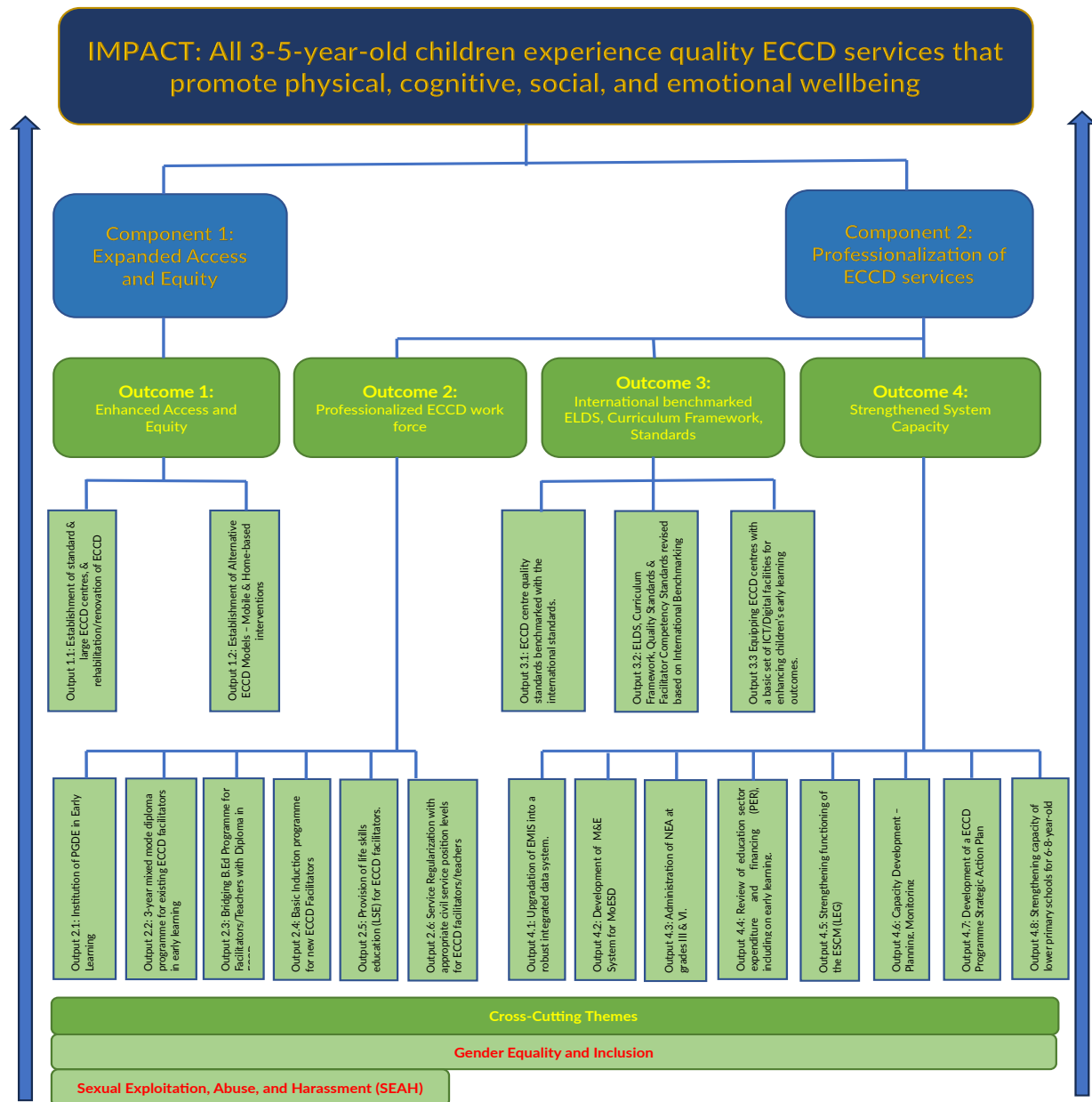
- There is universal access to quality ECCD programme for the 3-5-year-old children, including for those children from disadvantaged groups.
- Three-five-year-old children are physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally prepared for schooling.

The **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy Design** has two components:

- 1) Expanded access and equity, and
- 2) Professionalization of ECCD.

The Figure 2 below shows the interventions supporting achievement of the **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy Programme** objectives.

Figure 2: Results Framework of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy



These objectives will directly contribute to the GPE’s Goal and Core Indicators specified in the GPE 2025 Strategic Plan 2021-2025 as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy contribution to the GPE 2025 Strategic Goal

Goal	Indicators
To accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive, and resilient education systems for the 21 st century.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (SDG indicator 4.2.2) • Proportion of teachers in (a) pre-primary education with the minimum required qualifications (SDG indicator 4.c.1)

3.2. Components and Outcomes:

The **Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy** has two components as stated below:

- Component 1: Expanded access and equity, and
- Component 2: Professionalization of ECCD.

The Four Outcomes from these two components are as mentioned below –

- Outcome 1: Universal Access
- Outcome 2: Professionalization of ECCD workforce
- Outcome 3: ELDS, Curriculum Framework, and Standards
- Outcome 4: System Capacity Development

Gender Equality and Inclusion and *Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)* are cross-cutting themes in the programme.

3.2.1. Component 1: Expanded Access and Equity

Outcome 1: Increased access to ECCD centres for 3–5-year-old children by at least 52% over their baselines in 2023 (NER 37.66%; GER 54.47%) to 90% NER and 100% GER by 2029.

As per RGoB's 13th FYP priority, it is important that every 3–5-year-old-child has access to quality ECCD services. This would include children from diverse geographical locations – rural, urban, remote, scattered settlements; diverse socioeconomic background; various abilities and disabilities; and by gender. This will require to be pursued with equity and inclusiveness.

In 2023, the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 3–5-year-old children (13,012 – 6,378 F; 6,634 M) enrolled in ECCD centres stood at 37.66% (NER – 37.95% F; 37.38% M) and 54.47% (GER – 54.17% F; 54.76% M). By 2029 beginning, a projected 35,636¹⁸ 3–5-year-old children (100%) must have access to quality ECCD programme. In order to support fulfilment of this universal coverage, requirement of estimated number of centres (@22 children per centre) by 2029 would be 1,620¹⁹ from 525 in 2023; of these 1,134 are estimated to be supported by the Government (70%) and 486 anticipated to be supported by private, work place, NGOs, etc. (30%). Similarly, there would be an estimated requirement of 3,240²⁰ facilitators/teachers by 2029 beginning (909 in 2023), of which 2,268 would be the estimated requirement in government

¹⁸ Bhutanese in thousands have migrated to countries such as Australia, US, Canada, UK, Middle East, etc., many with their families, for economic opportunities and studies. Therefore, not all 3-5-year-old children as projected by the NSB may be in the country. Consequently, there may not be need for establishing ECCD centres as projected. Data collected by the ECCD&SEN Division of MoESD from the Local Education Offices indicate this.

¹⁹ As above (note 16).

²⁰ As above (note 16).

supported centres (592 in 2023), and 972 in private, work place, NGO, etc. centres. Additionally, it would be prudent to establish 20-30 large integrated inclusive ECCD centres in large populated areas. Further, there would be need for alternative ECCD models, such as Mobile ECCD centres (about 160) and Home-based interventions (about 190) to reach out to the hard-to-reach children, in particular for children who cannot avail centre-based ECCD services. Large ECCD centres, Mobile ECCD centres, and Home-based interventions will complement and supplement the overall national ECCD centre requirements.

The overall objective of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy is to support achievement of the RGoB's 13th FYP, which is “By 2029, all children between 3-5 years have access to Early Childhood Care and Development”. This shall be achieved through the following output activities.

The indicator data will be tracked from EMIS and disaggregated by gender, disabilities, and districts (urban/rural/remote) etc. on an annual basis. The data will be fed by the ECCD facilitators for their own centre and the DEOs/TEOs of the respective district/municipality will verify the information. During the DEO/TEO orientation on monitoring the implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, this requirement and the guidance for reporting disaggregated data will be included. It will be the responsibility of the MoESD to track this indicator and report to the Grant Agents (see section 5.5 for details) on an annual basis as indicated in the M&E framework. If required, the MoESD and the Grant Agents shall cross verify the data.

Output 1.1: Establishment of standard, medium, and large ECCD centres, and rehabilitation/ renovation of ECCD centres/other facilities into ECCD centres in Dzongkhags/ Thromdes

During the 4-year period (2024-2028) of the implementation of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, 200 new standard ECCD centres (80 under GPE/STG and 120 under WB PforR), 5 medium ECCD centres (GPE/STG), and 33 large ECCD centres (30 under WB PforR, and 3 under SCI) will be established. These new centres shall be constructed based on the revised ECCD Centre Construction Designs²¹, as approved by the MoESD and the Design Division of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MoIT). Such designs shall maintain minimum standards including ensuring safety, providing accessibility for children with disabilities, and gender appropriate facilities (example, gender disaggregated toilets), as well as prevention and protection from various hazards. These have been mentioned as issues/challenges in the recently completed *Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan* (SCI, Nov. 2023). Based on size of communities and number of children from birth to 5 years²², the choice of ECCD centre construction designs shall be either for a Small, Medium, and Large ECCD centres as applicable. Capacities of Small,

²¹ SCI (2023). Review and Update ECCD Centre Construction Design Report. November 2023.

²² This is only for assessment purposes. ECCD centres will continue to cater to 3-5-year-old children.

Medium, and Large ECCD centres are up to 15, 15-30, and more than 30 children respectively.²³ Small centre type is also known as the standard ECCD centre.

Additionally, 90 ECCD centres shall be either renovated and upgraded or existing facilities rehabilitated into ECCD centres. These shall be done under the World Bank's Programme for Results (PforR).

The MoESD has an established process of conducting a feasibility assessment and has clear criteria for the establishment of ECCD centres. The minimum requirement is 10 children for a centre to open and there should be enough children aged birth-60 months²⁴ to sustain the centre for at least five years. The child per facilitator ratio is 15:1 (maximum 15 children per facilitator).²⁵

The beneficiaries have been selected considering the unreached population as a priority. The process of identifying these groups involved review of existing data on ECCD access using the Annual Education Statistics (MoESD 2023) and rigorous consultation with local governments and District Authorities.

For instance, in the identification of sites for construction of ECCD centres, the District Education Offices carried out rapid surveys and consultation with the local government leaders and identified potential locations. Based on the proposals submitted by the districts, joint feasibility assessment of each of the sites was carried out by the MoESD, districts administration and local governments to select and finalize the sites, ensuring that there is adequate land and appropriate space for construction, as well as sufficient number of children aged birth to five to sustain the centres for at least five years.

Further, the construction sites have been selected through the above-mentioned process, involving all stakeholders. Standard designs have also been prepared to bring about quality standards in the constructions, while leaving room for adaptation at the implementation level. The designs have been approved by the government's regulating agency, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, and accepted by the local authorities. Additionally, Bill of Quantities (BoQ) are also ready for tendering of the works.

The establishment of the centres shall be in accordance with the *Operational Guidelines for the ECCD Centres* (MoE, 2018) and as per the revised ECCD construction designs (refer Para 1 above). This shall include community sensitization and their role in supporting the ECCD centre, formation of a Centre Management Committee, child safety and protection mechanism, provision of age appropriate play and learn materials, basic child friendly furnishing, site inspection, the initial materials such as curriculum, reference documents, stationery, and a trained facilitator.²⁶ All children from the catchment area irrespective of

²³ SCI (2023). Review and Update ECCD Centre Construction Design Report. November 2023.

²⁴ See note 20 above.

²⁵ ECCD & SEN (2018). Guidelines for ECCD Centres. ECCD & SEN Division, MoE.

²⁶ Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan Report (SCI, 2023) has also pointed out these as issues.

their ability, socioeconomic background or gender, will be enrolled in these centres if they are between the age of 3-5 years (details as mentioned in paragraph 1 above). The maintenance and day-to-day operation cost of ECCD centres will be managed by Gewog/District as per the existing division of responsibility.

Additionally, the national ECCD programme will encourage and involve the private sector in strengthening the provision of ECCD services. This will mainly involve establishment of additional ECCD centres by private entrepreneurs, largely in urban centres. This will further be expanding the availability of quality programmes. The programme will also encourage and work with employers in further enhancing establishment of ECCD services within their workplaces, enabling working parents to access quality care and early education for their children.

In the 4-year period of the implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, a total of 200 standard, 5 medium, and 33 large new ECCD centres will be established, and 90 ECCD centres will be renovated or rehabilitated (for details refer to foregoing paragraphs and Table 3 below) in phased manner as indicated in the Result Framework (Annex 2).

Table 3: Establishment of standard, medium, and large ECCD centres, renovation and/or rehabilitation

Output Activities	GPE	WB (P4R)	SCI	Total
	STG			
1.Establishment of Standard ECCD centre	80	120	-	200
2.Establishment of medium ECCD centre	5	-	-	5
3.Establishment of large ECCD centre	-	30	3	33
4.Renovation/rehabilitation of existing ECCD centres / other facilities into ECCD centres	-	90	-	90

Output 1.2: Establishment of Alternative ECCD Models

Bhutan has many scattered communities in remote locations. These remote areas and scattered communities present difficulties in establishing centre-based programmes due to the smaller number of ECCD aged children in those communities. Such difficulties call for innovation and flexibility in designing alternative approaches to ECCD service delivery. Therefore, during the period of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy and the 13th FYP, availability and accessibility to ECCD services in rural and remote areas shall be enhanced through establishment of mobile ECCD centres and/or Home-Based ECCD Interventions (HBIs) in areas where standard ECCD centres are not viable.

(a) Establishment of Home-based ECCD Interventions

Supported by the UNICEF, the Home-based ECCD intervention (HBI) services have been successfully piloted in eleven sites in eleven Dzongkhags (districts).

This HBI service during the pilot phase has been provided by volunteer ECCD facilitators, assisted by parent volunteers in 2 to 3 small, scattered villages catering to 3 - 5 children in each village. In this model, the ECCD facilitator visits the village and conducts one face-to-face session and three virtual sessions in a month. Virtual sessions are conducted with parents in groups in their own locality for the sessions, led by one parent volunteer. However, going forward as the HBI services expand during the 13th FYP, there is need to have dedicated ECCD facilitators/teachers to provide dedicated ECCD services through HBI approach. These facilitators shall be secured through implementing Outcome 2.

During the 13th FYP, HBI services shall be scaled to reach large parts of the scattered, small communities in remote areas across the country. Districts have identified a total of 191 HBIs for the 13th FYP. While GPE/STG will establish 20 HBIs during 4-year period of the programme, there is funding gap for establishing the remaining 160 HBIs, funding for which needs to be secured from various sources during the 13th FYP.

Before scaling across the country as per need, the current Home-based ECCD interventions shall be evaluated for its efficacy in addressing the challenges of providing ECCD services to scattered populations in remote locations.

Refer Table 4 below and the Results Framework (Annex 2) for details.

Table 4: Establishment of Home-based ECCD Interventions

Output Activities	Total HBI needed	Baseline (2023)	New HBI under GPE/STG	UNICEF (AWP)	Gap
(a) Evaluation of pilot Home-based interventions.	-	-	-	Evaluation	-
(b) Establishment of Home-based ECCD Intervention	191	11	20	-	160

(b) Establishment of Mobile ECCD Centres

Mobile ECCD centre services have been piloted successfully in sixteen sites in eight Dzongkhags (districts) since 2018.

The model of mobile ECCD centre shares facilitators when there are insufficient children in a single village to meet the minimum requirement of 8 children per centre. These shared centre facilities necessitate a combined total of 15 children, with the facilitator working 3 days in one village and 3 days in the other. During the facilitator's absence, parent volunteers operate the centre under the facilitator's guidance.

However, going forward as the Mobile ECCD centre services expand during the 13th FYP, there shall be need to have dedicated ECCD facilitators/teachers to provide dedicated ECCD services to the children through Mobile ECCD centre approach. Two villages

together with a total number of 15 children, shall have three facilitators/teachers. These facilitators shall be secured through implementing Outcome 2.

During the 13th FYP, districts have identified need for 161 mobile ECCD centres to be established for each of the two nearby villages across the country. The districts aim to set up these facilities utilizing existing infrastructure without significant additional spending, recognizing the lack of sustainability when the number of children decreases. The expenditure for these facilities is expected to be financed by the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB).

Refer Table 5 below and the Results Framework (Annex 2) for details.

Table 5: Establishment of Mobile ECCD centres

Output Activity	Total Need	Baseline (2023)	RGoB
a) Establishment of Mobile ECCD centres	161	16	145

Recurrent costs:

There will be costs to the government in the form of regular supplies and maintenance of the ECCD centres and facilities. These, as per norms and practice, shall be borne by the government.

GPE/STG Programme contribution to access enhancement:

Through the establishment of 80 standard and 5 medium ECCD centres, and 20 Home-based Intervention services under the GPE/STG, a total of about 1,525 3-5-year-old children would benefit from the programme. Through the contribution of GPE/STG the enrolment of 3-5-year-old children in ECCD centres is estimated to increase by around five percent over their baselines, i.e., from NER 37.66% in 2023 to 43%, by 2028.

Monitoring and Evaluation of ECCD Centre Construction:

The rationale of this section is to provide a clear overview of the essential elements and procedures involved in monitoring and evaluating the infrastructure development of ECCD centres in the Districts and Thromdes. The monitoring approach will encompass several stakeholders, such as engineers, District Education Officers (DEO), and principals of parent schools of ECCD centres, to ensure efficient supervision during crucial project stages, including ensuring for gender and disability friendly facilities.

The monitoring method will begin at the start of the **foundation laying phase**. The project engineer will regularly visit the site to verify that the foundation work is in accordance with the authorized plans and specifications.

The DEO and principals of parent schools of ECCD centres will partake in planned visits to offer input and guarantee that the foundation is appropriate for the ECCD center's intended use. Continuous monitoring will be conducted **during the construction process** to ensure compliance with construction schedules, quality benchmarks, and safety protocols. Regular site inspections will be conducted by engineers to evaluate the progress, identify potential concerns, and suggest appropriate corrective actions.

The DEO and the parent school principal of ECCD centres will participate in **regular monitoring** to verify that the infrastructure is in line with the educational goals and community requirements.

The **handover phase** will entail a collaborative examination conducted by the engineer, DEO, and parent school principal of the ECCD centre to evaluate the finished structure's adherence to design requirements and quality standards. The handover process will involve the creation of records detailing the finished infrastructure, and the parties responsible will verify that all contractual responsibilities have been fulfilled to their satisfaction.

To guarantee successful completion of high-quality infrastructure that meets the educational requirements of the community, site engineers, DEOs, and principals of parent schools of ECCD centres needs to be engaged at every important project milestones. **Travel expenses** included in the construction package as work-charge guarantees that monitoring activities are sufficiently funded, hence enhancing effectiveness and accountability in the monitoring and assessment process.

3.2.2. Component 2: Professionalization of ECCD

Component 2 – Professionalization of ECCD services has the following three Outcomes –

Outcome 2: Professionalization of ECCD Work Force

Outcome 3: International benchmarked ELDS, Curriculum Framework, and Standards

Outcome 4: System Capacity Building

Outcome 2: Enhanced professional capacity of the ECCD workforce to deliver quality ECCD services.

Competency of ECCD facilitators/teachers will be a key determining factor for the provision of quality ECCD services to the children. This would require ECCD teachers/facilitators mastering a core body of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions and demonstrating to effectively promote the development, learning, and well-being of young children. The need for such a competency would require ECCD facilitators/teachers to have higher qualifications such as a university degree in Early Learning, including postgraduate diploma in Early Learning, etc.

At the moment, meeting this minimum qualification requirement is a challenge, challenging the provision of quality ECCD services to the children (MoE & UNICEF, 2020; SCI, 2023²⁷²⁸). As of now class XII graduates are recruited and inducted into the profession with a two-week intensive basic training before they are deployed to ECCD centres as facilitators. This has a bearing on the quality of services provided in the ECCD centres (MoE & UNICEF, 2020; SCI, 2023²⁹). In the recent years some of the facilitators have enrolled into a 3-year mixed mode ECCD Diploma programme offered by the Paro College of Education (PCOE), Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), after gaining a minimum of two years' experience as an ECCD facilitator (SCI, 2023)³⁰. As of 2023³¹, there are 221 facilitators with a diploma in early learning, working along-side 595 grade XII facilitators having completed the basic 2-week intensive training (SCI, 2023)³². This 3-year mixed mode Diploma programme in early learning shall continue during the 13th FYP. The proposal during the 13th FYP is also to institute a Postgraduate Diploma Programme in Education (PGDE) in Early Learning.

Much as there is need to enhance the qualification requirement of ECCD facilitators/teachers to provide much needed quality ECCD services, following the significant increase in the ECCD ambition in the 13th FYP, there would be still need for a

²⁷ SCI (2023). Situational Analysis of ECCD Professionalization & Professional Development. November 2023.

²⁸ SCI (2023). Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan. November 2023.

²⁹ Ibid, i.e., as noted in footnotes 25 and 26 above.

³⁰ SCI (2023). Situational Analysis of ECCD Professionalization & Professional Development. November 2023.

³¹ 13th FYP ECCD Action Plan (2023). ECCD&SEN, DSE, MoESD. September 2023.

³² SCI (2023). Situational Analysis of ECCD Professionalization & Professional Development. November 2023.

significant number of ECCD facilitators with grade XII plus the 2-week basic intensive training. During the 13th FYP plan, there would be in the ECCD system three categories of teachers/facilitators, i.e., those with 2-week basic training (1,578 during 2028), 3-year mixed mode ECCD Diploma certificate holders (762 during 2028), and the PGDE in Early Learning (90 by 2028). As recommended by the study (SCI, 2023)³³, it is also anticipated that the 3-year mixed mode diploma programme will continue well into the 15th FYP, eventually leading to complete phase out of the grade XII facilitators with basic training from the system. The same study (SCI, 2023)³⁴ also recommended that there be a bridging programme for aspiring ECCD facilitators with Diploma certificate to complete a university degree programme in Education (B.Ed.), as well as offer a Postgraduate Diploma programme in Education (PGDE) for aspiring university graduates to become teachers in the ECCD sector.

There is also the issue of remuneration for the ECCD facilitators pegged to the position in the civil service (MoE & UNICEF, 2020; SCI, 2023³⁵). It is important during the 13th FYP that ECCD facilitators with 3-year mixed mode Diploma certificate are placed in S2 position level, in the same manner that other such diploma holders are placed (SCI, 2023)³⁶. Similarly, as the first batch of PGDE in Early Learning graduates join the service, starting 2026, they be placed in P5 position level. Accordingly, the nomenclature for these two categories of ECCD professionals must also be changed as “Teachers”, like any other teachers in the system. During the 13th FYP, a bridging programme shall be facilitated for 3-year mixed mode Diploma holders to pursue Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in Early Learning.

Professionalization of ECCD includes a range of professional development programmes, including the Diploma programme, Bridging degree programme, Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme and short basic training programmes aimed at enhancing the capacity and qualification levels of ECCD facilitators. The programmes are designed considering the need for creation of a new cadre of educators at a higher entry level, while also ensuring that existing educators with lower qualification level are provided the opportunity to upgrade their qualification level and rise to the newly introduced professional level. The three components of professional development including the Diploma, Bridging degree and PGDE are efforts at different levels to raise the qualification and professional capacity of ECCD facilitators. Therefore, the programme is geared towards elevating the overall standard of ECCD services and ensure that educators possess the necessary skills to meet the diverse needs of young children.

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Both studies of SCI (2023) – Situational Analysis of ECCD Professionalization & Professional Development and Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan have pointed out to this as an issue.

³⁶ SCI (2023). Situational Analysis of ECCD Professionalization & Professional Development. November 2023.

Output 2.1: Institution of Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Early Learning

In Bhutan all secondary teachers go through a vigorous 2-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme in secondary teaching subjects and professional educational studies. Primary teachers get trained through a 4-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree programme. Beginning 2025, MoESD is initiating to start a 1-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme, specialized in early learning. This new programme is being initiated to improve professional competency of ECCD teachers. Paro College of Education (PCOE) has already developed the PGDE Programme in Early Learning.

During the 4-year period of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, MoESD with RCSC, as per the established selection process, shall recruit 30 university graduates annually into the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme in early learning beginning 2025. The selection process shall aspire to select equal proportions of male and female candidates. The PGDE programme in early learning is planned to be delivered by the PCOE, RUB. The first three cohorts shall be supported under the GPE/STG. By year 2028, there shall be at least 90 ECCD teachers with PGDE in early learning in the ECCD subsector as indicated in the Result Framework (Annex 2). (Refer Table 6 below)

Output 2.2: Qualification Upgradation of existing ECCD facilitators through a 3-year Mixed-Mode Diploma programme in early learning

The basic training of the facilitators initially prepares them to deliver the ECCD centre programme. In order to develop core competencies to function as competent ECCD facilitators, they need to undergo a structured academic professional development programme. Considering their specific functions and competencies required, the MoESD initiated the enrollment of in-service ECCD facilitators into 3-year mixed mode Diploma Programme at the Paro College of Education (PCOE). The PCOE is one of the constituent colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) which started as a Teacher Training Centre (TTC) in 1975. The college introduced the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Development (DECCD) from 2014 as a 3-year mixed mode programme and is accredited by the RUB. The programme is designed to suit the working pattern of ECCD facilitators, where facilitators attend residential school for six (6) weeks during the winter vacation and carry out their academic projects as they do their regular work in their ECCD centres. Through this programme 221 ECCD teachers with a Diploma certificate already serve in the ECCD centres across the country (as of Nov 2023; 274 in 2022). As of 2022, there were 40 ECCD facilitators enrolled in this 3-year mixed-mode programme. This programme shall be continued during the implementation of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy and the 13th FYP at PCOE.

The quality of training provided to the ECCD facilitators is a critical issue in preparing them to handle the ECCD centre programme competently. The college has in place a system to ensure the quality of the programme delivered by them. In order to monitor and ensure quality of the diploma programme, an external examiner with relevant work experience

and knowledge is appointed. The external examiner evaluates the semester plan and delivery of the module during the academic year by observing the classroom sessions, reviewing of variety of student work which has been assessed and observing assessments in progress. He/she also checks that the semester end-examination papers are set according to the contents covered, the answer scripts and final marks moderated amongst the module tutors. On completion of the assessment, he/she writes a report with recommendations and submits to the college for follow up.

Two forms of assessments are used in this programme, i.e., continuous assessment and semester end examination. To pass a module a student must obtain a minimum of 50% overall on both the continuous assessment and semester end examination. However, students must obtain a minimum of 40% each in continuous assessment and semester end examinations in order to pass or be promoted to next semester. The strengths of the programme are reflected in the modules taught in this programme: the modules are very practical, relevant, hands-on, and require the facilitators to plan, execute and reflect on the activities thereby promoting reflective practices amongst facilitators. The college finds ways to monitor and provide face-to-face support to the ECCD diploma students while they practice in their centres, as illustrated below.

The ECCD centre facilitators in the 3-year mixed mode diploma programme spend substantial amount of time in the ECCD centres while they undergo the training. The college monitors and supports diploma students through the use of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which is the localized version of Moodle. The respective module tutors also use social media platform to provide support and monitor the progress of students' learning. The tutors interact with trainees using the chat and discussion forum available on VLE, using social media platform especially WeChat, through emails and phone calls. The cost of monitoring is covered by the course fees paid to the college. However, the on-site visit to monitor and support the diploma trainees while they are posted at the centre has not been always possible as the trainees are spread across all districts; visiting them is a big challenge and expensive. The college is exploring the alternative measures such as involving school principals / teachers for this purpose.

The existing 3-year mixed mode ECCD Diploma programme has been internally reviewed by the RUB and PCOE in consultation with the key stakeholders of the programme, including MoESD, MoH, INGOs and ECCD practitioners. The review primarily assessed the relevance of the modules. The whole course is now restructured based on emerging professional development needs of ECCD facilitators.

During the implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, a total of 300 ECCD facilitators/teachers (100 under STG and 200 under MG) shall be supported, in phased manner, in their professional upgradation through the 3-year mixed-mode Diploma programme as indicated in the Result Framework (Annex 2). The candidates for the programme shall be selected based on the existing selection criteria and procedures. Given that the current proportion of male to female ECCD facilitators are at the ratio of

about 5:95 percent, the selection process should aspire to at least maintain this gender ratio. (Refer Table 6 below)

By 2028, there shall be in the ECCD subsector a total of 521 ECCD teachers/facilitators with 3-year mixed-mode Diploma certificates across the country.

Output 2.3: Bridging degree programme for facilitators/teachers with Diploma in ECCD

Currently, ECCD facilitators are recruited with just a class XII certificate, and inducted with a 13-day basic training. From the existing pool of 941 facilitators in the country, about 23 percent have acquired professional qualification of Diploma in ECCD through the 3-year mixed mode diploma programme offered by Paro College of Education (refer output 2.2 above). On the other hand, a Postgraduate Diploma in ECCD (PGDE) is being developed to be offered to the RCSC selected university graduates beginning 2025. They shall be recruited at a higher position level (P5) in the civil service as ECCD teachers. This is an effort to elevate professional competency of ECCD professionals to similar levels as that for schoolteachers. In the meantime, there is a career ladder being planned for ECCD facilitators where existing facilitators would have opportunities for promotion from position level S5 up to SS1 in the civil service as per RCSC. However, elevation to higher levels will be contingent upon meeting corresponding qualification requirements for different levels.

In this context, the mixed mode Bridging programme, leading to a bachelor's degree in education (B.Ed.) is seen as an integral stage in the continuum of professional development of ECCD facilitators, within the broader goal of professionalizing early childhood educators.

The mixed mode Bridging Bachelor's degree programme being proposed in the 13th FYP is an effort to further improve the professional competency of ECCD facilitators/teachers. This will also bridge the existing facilitators with diploma qualification to the new position created at P5 level, so that these facilitators with the requisite professional competency will have the opportunity to pursue higher qualification and position level as ECCD teachers. The programme is proposed to be offered in a mixed mode approach over a period of 3 years, whereby participants will gain credits from the course, in addition to the credits transferred from the diploma programme, culminating into a Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) degree in ECCD.

Since the Paro College of Education (PCOE) specializes in both early learning (offering 3-year mixed mode diploma programme) and offers full-fledged degree programme in primary teacher training programme (B.Ed), it is decided that the bridging programme shall be offered at the PCOE. Accordingly, during 2024 the college will have the required programmes ready for implementation beginning year 2025.

In the 4-year period of the GPE/STG, a total of 60 ECCD facilitators/teachers with Diploma in ECCD shall be enrolled in the bridging degree programme in phased manner as indicated in the Results Framework (Annexure 2). The candidates for the programme

shall be selected based on a set selection criteria and procedures. Given that the current proportion of male to female ECCD facilitators are at the ratio of about 5:95 percent, the selection process should aspire to at least maintain this gender ratio. (Refer Table 6 below)

Output 2.4: Basic Induction programme for the new ECCD Facilitators

The MoESD has developed a Basic training package for training newly recruited ECCD facilitators (grade XII passed), including ECCD parenting education package. Newly recruited facilitators get a 10-day basic training in delivering ECCD centre programme, followed by a 10-day training on delivering ECCD parenting education programme; a total of 20 days training. For this purpose, MoESD has trained a pool of core trainers within the country through support of development partners in the past years. The core trainers provide training to the newly recruited ECCD facilitators using the standard training packages.

During the period of the 13th FYP (2024-2029), there will still be requirement to continue to recruit class XII graduates as ECCD facilitators. Pursuing the target of achieving universal access to ECCD services by 2029 will ill-afford not to recruit them as the PGDE and Diploma ECCD teachers will not make the required numbers. This will be particularly true during the 13th FYP period. Therefore, during this period the system of recruiting class XII graduates as ECCD facilitators will need to continue.

In the 4-year period of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, a total of 616 class XII graduates (150 under STG and 466 under WB PforR) shall be recruited as ECCD facilitators and provided basic induction (2-week crash course) programme in phased manner as indicated in the Result Framework (Annex 2). The candidates for the programme shall be selected based on the existing selection criteria and procedures. Given that the current proportion of male ECCD facilitators are only about five percent of the total, and the need to have more male candidates, the early learning programme shall aspire to recruit about 15-20 percent male candidates of the total ECCD facilitator selection during the 13th FYP.

For the provision of a basic induction training programme to the freshly recruited ECCD facilitators, the following activities have either been completed or shall be carried out. Activities under this output include – development of a training package for basic ECCD facilitator training, training of trainers for the basic ECCD facilitator training and QMTEC and providing basic training and parenting education for the new ECCD facilitators. Under PforR programme of the WB, the following activities have been completed during 2023:

- a) The current package for the basic ECCD facilitator training has been reviewed and revised.
- b) Based on the revised facilitator training package (a) above, Training of Trainers (ToT) has been provided to 52 trainers of basic ECCD facilitator training and QMTEC.

- c) Basic training and parenting education based on the revised training package have been provided to 466 new ECCD facilitators and resource persons by the Trainers in (b) above.

(Refer Table 6 below)

Output 2.5: Conduct an Assessment on the Capacity Development Needs of ECCD facilitators to inform professional development programmes.

ECCD centre programmes are critical in providing the positive experiences that children aged 3-5 need in building a strong foundation for learning and holistic development. In this context, considering that quality of ECCD programmes are pivotal in determining the impact and outcomes for children, the aspiration for high quality programmes underpin all efforts and initiatives in Bhutan. To realize this goal, the growing need for ECCD facilitators or early childhood educators with higher qualifications and specialized professional training needs to be addressed as the skills and knowledge of ECCD practitioners play a vital role in the delivery of quality ECCD programmes. Currently, ECCD facilitators in Bhutan are dedicated individuals, with limited formal qualifications in early childhood education. Research indicates that well-trained educators are more effective in promoting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, which is why investing in higher qualification and training of ECCD facilitators could yield higher quality of ECCD services and improved outcomes for children.

Considering these benefits, proposal for the creation of a higher position level for ECCD professionals called 'ECCD Teachers' is being initiated, along with higher entry qualifications. To this date, an in-depth assessment focusing on the capacity development needs of ECCD facilitators has not been conducted. The MoESD is working towards the recruitment of aspiring individuals with a bachelor's degree to be provided the opportunity to undergo a one year Post Graduate Diploma in ECCD (PGDE) in the Paro College of Education and simultaneously, the ECCD diploma programme will still be offered to individuals with a minimum of grade 12 certificate. It is clear from these initiatives that capacity development is not only critical for quality assurance but also for the professional development career path of ECCD facilitators. However, an in-depth assessment focusing on the capacity development needs of ECCD facilitators will inform the ECCD facilitators' professional development programmes. Therefore, it is proposed that a needs assessment of ECCD facilitators who have graduated from the diploma programme and those who have not enrolled in the diploma programme be conducted to inform the capacity development needs through the GPE System Capacity Grant (SCG). This will ensure that the future modules and capacity development training are evidence-based to address the needs of the practitioners in the field.

The ECCD facilitators' Capacity Development Needs Assessment will inform professional development programmes to ensure that ECCD Professionals have improved capacities and are equipped with a deeper understanding of child development, age-appropriate and child-centred methods and strategies for promoting active learning and holistic development of young children.

Output activity 2.5 shall be implemented under GPE/SCG programme. (refer Table 6 below)

Output 2.6: Training of ECCD facilitators on Life Skills Education (LSE) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

According to the World Health Organization/South and East Asia Regional Office Regional Framework, Life Skills are a group of psychological competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Life Skills can be categorized into three broad areas. (1) Social Skills: Establishing relationships, communicate effectively, (2) Thinking Skills: Self Awareness, Social Awareness, Goal setting and planning, problem solving and decision making, and (3) Emotional Skills: Coping with and understanding emotions and stress.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is an integral part of education and represents the first essential step in achieving the goals of basic education and any efforts towards enhancing the quality of education in general. It is in this critical period that children should be provided stimulation and experience that would contribute to their holistic development. Learning to understand oneself and the world around constitute an important aspect of learning at this stage.

Trained facilitators will contribute to the promotion of healthy and socially accepted individuals who grow up to being able to deal with the difficulties of daily life and knowing how to deal with risky situations through the incorporation of LSE into parenting Education.

The output activity being implemented under GPE/SCG programme, Life Skills Education and Comprehensive Sexuality Education shall be provided to 115 ECCD facilitators and 24 focal DEOs. (Refer Table 6 below)

Output 2.7: Service Regularization and appropriate civil service position levels for ECCD facilitators/teachers

RCSC selected university graduates, upon successful completion of programme of studies/training in secondary PGDE programme are placed in Civil Service Position Level P5 in the Management and Professional Category in the civil service. The university graduate selection to the proposed PGDE specialized in early learning shall also be selected through the Civil Service selection process. Therefore, it is only fair and logical that ECCD teachers with PGDE certificate in early learning be placed in P5 civil service position level at par with other PGDE certificate holders in the civil service within education system. This will first require creation of the post for ECCD teachers with PGDE in early learning in the civil service at P5 level.

Similarly, RCSC selected candidates with diploma certificates are placed in S2 in the civil service. Therefore, it is only fair and logical that ECCD teachers/facilitators be placed at S2 upon successful completion of their 3-year mixed-mode diploma programme.

Additionally, there shall also be in the system ECCD teachers with B.Ed. degree in early learning, obtained through the bridging programme being facilitated for 3-year mixed mode Diploma holders to pursue Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) in Early Learning (Refer Output 2.3 above).

These ECCD teachers with B.Ed. degree, PGDE, and Diploma certificate holders be designated as ECCD Teachers, instead of current designation as ECCD facilitators.

This output activity shall be pursued by the MoESD with the RCSC, the competent authority for civil service, to avail at par civil service positions and the designations for the ECCD teachers with the qualifications discussed herein above. (Refer Table 6 below)

Recurrent costs:

There will be recurrent costs to the government in the form remuneration/salaries to the ECCD workforce during the 13th FYP, which shall be borne by the government.

Table 6: Output activities under professionalization of ECCD workforce

Output No.	Output Activities	GPE			WB (P4R)	UNICEF (AWP)	RGoB	Total
		STG	MG	SCG				
2.1	Institution of Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Early Learning.	90	-	-	-	-	-	90
2.2	Qualification upgradation of existing ECCD facilitators through a 3-year mixed mode Diploma programme in Early Learning	100	200	-	-	-	-	300
2.3	Bridging degree programme for ECCD facilitators with Diploma in Early Learning.	60	-	-	-	-	-	60
2.4	Basic induction programme for the new ECCD facilitators.	150	-	-	466 ³⁷	-	-	616
2.5	Conducting assessment on capacity development needs of the ECCD facilitators	-	-	-	-	Needs assessment	-	Needs assessment
2.6	Training of ECCD facilitators on life skills education (LSE) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education.	-	-	115 facilitators + 24 DEOs	-	-	-	115 facilitators + 24 DEOs
2.7	Service regularization and appropriate civil service positions levels ECCD facilitators/teachers.	-	-	-	-	-	Civil service positions	Civil service positions

³⁷ Activity has been completed under PforR programme.

Outcome 3: Revised ELDS, curriculum framework, quality standards and facilitator competency standards based on international benchmarking operational in the ECCD programme.

Presence of quality curriculum, learning resources, standards and guides are critical to enhancing learning outcomes of children in the ECCD centres. The Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) serve as the learning framework in ECCD programme. Curriculum is implemented following the Curriculum Implementation Guide (CIG). Assessment of children's learning progress in ECCD centres are carried out using a checklist, which are dependent on availability of tools. Tools apparently are not always available for want of computers and printing facilities. Other guidelines/manuals/tools include – Pre-Primary Programme Guideline, Operational Guideline for ECCD centres, Parenting Education Manual, Quality Monitoring Tool for ECCD Centres (QMTEC), etc.

ECCD Evaluation (MoE & UNICEF, 2020) found gaps in curriculum guide/manual, learning resources, centre operational guidelines, Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS), Step-by-Step programme, parenting education, etc. These gaps have affected quality of learning and development outcomes of children. Among others, ECCD evaluation report (MoE & UNICEF, 2020) noted the following:

- There is a question as to whether the Curriculum Implementation Guide (CIG) is sufficiently explicit enough to guide practice by facilitators given the limited training and formal education of the facilitators. It is argued that practitioners with relatively low levels of academic and professional qualifications need support in translating ELDS (or NELDS) into learning activities with observable learning objectives. Further, the level of CIG is found to be general and not adequately differentiated for age progression.
- There is gap in relation to guidelines for group care of children under the age of 3 years, which need addressing within the draft National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) under development.
- There is need to consolidate and streamline provisions in Pre-Primary Programme Guideline (REC, 2012) with those provided in the CIG.
- There are also discrepancies in the centre resources and measures between the observed and requirements listed in the operational guidelines, needing following up with centres on how operational guidelines are implemented at the centre level.
- The extent to which the QMTEC is systematically enacted in the field has not been clear, even though quality monitoring and provision of tailored support to deliver quality programmes is essential.

Further, the *Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan* (SCI, 2023) pointed out to challenges posed by lack of special needs support, inadequate teaching materials, and the preference

for store-bought toys by children, and that the ECCD facilitators struggled to address the unique needs of children with disabilities due to the absence of training opportunities.

Accordingly, among others, curriculum guide/manual, operational guidelines, ELDS, parenting programme shall be reviewed and revised to address the gaps as appropriate, as well as address the issue of providing adequate learning resources and assessment tools.

Output 3.1: ECCD centre quality standards benchmarked with the international standards of a developed country.

The definition of quality in ECCD centres in Bhutan encompasses three sets of standards, including:

- a) *Learning Outcomes Framework* or *Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)* define children's learning and developmental outcomes for age.
- b) *ECCD Centre quality Framework*: The framework defines standards related to inputs, environments, support and processes related to the effective operation of ECCD centres.
- c) *ECCD Competency Framework*: The framework describes the knowledge, skills and behaviour or practices that are necessary for ECCD facilitators to be able to deliver quality in ECCD centres.

The standards have been developed considering international best practices, emerging science of early childhood development and sociocultural context of Bhutan. The standards have also been implemented effectively for many years and there have not been any limitations identified, particularly because no assessments have been carried out. In the efforts towards strengthening the quality of ECCD programme in the country in recent times, there is heightened expectation from the government on the need for programme to be of high quality, comparable to international standards.

In this context, the purpose of the activity is to review the three sets of standards mentioned above to assess for their relevance and effectiveness in relation to global standards and international best practices, and accordingly revise them to align with top notch international practices. The global quality benchmarking with global practices is planned to be carried out by comparing the frameworks with the standards of two countries – Australia and New Zealand – involving relevant agencies and experts in these countries. The two countries have been identified considering that these two countries are among the leading countries with high quality early childhood education programmes. More importantly, the quality frameworks and standards of the two countries are strongly aligned to their respective cultural contexts and developmental aspirations, which Bhutan also aspires for, in terms of quality and outcomes of early childhood education. The technical team for the review, comparison, and revising the quality standards will comprise of about five people from Bhutan who will travel to the two countries and work with expert groups in the two countries over a period of about two weeks.

The cost estimated for the activity includes the fees to be paid to the institutes and individuals involved in the review and revision of the standards. It also includes the travel expenses and subsistence allowances of the relevant officials involved in the programme.

Activities under Output 3.1 shall be implemented under GPE/STG funding. (Refer Table 7 below)

Output 3.2: Revision and implementation of ELDS, ECCD Curriculum Framework, Quality Standards and Facilitator Competency Standards based on International Benchmarking

During the second year of implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy, and upon completion of ECCD centre quality standards benchmarked with the international standards of a developed country (Output 3.1 above), Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS), ECCD Curriculum Framework, ECCD centre Quality Standards, and ECCD Facilitator Competency Standards, shall be revised based on the International Benchmarking.

The ELDS is the guiding benchmark for children's developmental outcomes in the national context and serves as the curriculum framework. The ELDS is already being implemented at the ECCD centre level by ECCD facilitators as a guide for designing learning activities and assessing children's learning progress. A learning assessment checklist based on the ELDS is already being used as assessment tool in all ECCD centres.

Further, the ELDS is already integrated in the ECCD centre quality assessment tool, the QMTEC (Quality Monitoring Tool for ECCD Centres), which is conducted annually. The integration is specifically in QMTEC Key Area 2: 'ECCD programmes meet the developmental needs of children' with ten specific indicators across all developmental domains. The review of ELDS proposed in the project would involve assessing the ELDS and quality standards against international best practices and improving all aspects of quality in ECCD centres.

The specific activities within this output (3.2) will include the following three activities –

- 1) Revision of ELDS, ECCD curriculum framework, ECCD centre quality standards, and ECCD facilitator competency standards based on international benchmarking in output 3.1 above.
- 2) Orientation of 300 ECCD facilitators on the revised curriculum framework and standards (refer activity 1 above).
- 3) Orientation of 300 parent school principals on the revised centre quality standards (refer activity 1 above).

Activities under Output 3.2 shall be implemented under GPE/STG funding. Refer Table 7 below and Results Framework (Annex 2) for details.

Output 3.3: Equipping ECCD centres with a set of ICT/Digital facilities for enhancing children’s early learning outcomes.

OECD (2022)³⁸ contain that early childhood can be a window of opportunity for introducing children and families to safe, creative and educational uses of digital technology. Similar findings have been reported in New Zealand in 2004.³⁹ However, in Bhutan, while assessment of children’s learning progress in ECCD centres are carried out using a checklist, they are not always available for want of computers and printing facilities.⁴⁰ Under the circumstances, there is need to support ECCD centres with items such as Smart TVs, computers, printers, and internet connectivity. These can facilitate facilitators in organizing a wide range of creative lessons and activities with their children in the ECCD centres, significantly enhancing the learning outcomes of children. ECCD facilitators shall be oriented on the safe use and maintenance of the digital facilities during basic induction and during handover of the equipment.

Accordingly, the GPE/STG funding will support 120 ECCD centres with supply of a set of Smart TV, computers, printers, and internet connectivity (to be supported by the government’s digitization initiative). Refer Results Framework (Annexure B) and Table 7 below for details. The same supplies for the remaining ECCD centres across the country shall be mobilized by the RGoB through various sources during the 13th FYP.

Table 7: Output activities under international benchmarked ELDS, Curriculum Framework, Standards

Output No.	Output Activities	GPE
		STG
3.1	Benchmarking ECCD centre quality standards with international standards of a developed country.	International Benchmarking
3.2	(a) ELDS, curriculum, quality standards and facilitator competency standards revised based on international benchmarking.	Complete set
	(b) ECCD facilitators orientation on the revised curriculum framework and standards.	300
	(c) Orientation of parent school principals on the revised centre quality standards.	300
3.3	Supply ECCD centres with a set of Smart TV, computers, and printers.	120

³⁸ OECD (2022). Chapter 2. Digitalization and early childhood and care: Trends and challenges. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/30e36f0f-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/30e36f0f-en#biblio-d1e3030-cfcd42735d>

³⁹ MoE (2004). The role and potential of ICT in early childhood education. <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/ictinecefinal.pdf>

⁴⁰ MoE & UNICEF (2020). Evaluation of ECCD programme.

Outcome 4: Strengthened system capacity for system transformation in early learning.

The education system Enabling Factors Analysis (EFA) by the Local Education Group (LEG) and its assessment by the Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP) has identified that achievement of the Early Learning Policy Priority reform area may be affected by lack of progress in certain enabling factors. These enabling factors include Education Management Information System, quality and reliability of data, planning and monitoring capabilities, deeper understanding in learning outcomes, education sector expenditure and financing, functioning of Education Sector Coordination Meetings, etc.

In providing the assessment of the same EFA, the ITAP has concurred with the LEG's identification of challenges and steps needed to address those challenges, as well as have identified additional and/or amplified certain challenges. Accordingly, the LEG, consistent with ITAP's recommendations, has identified a number of actions that would need to be taken to address the challenges identified. These actions are addressed through the following output activities.

Output 4.1: Upgrading Education Management Information System (EMIS) into a robust integrated data system.

Even though the Education Management Information System (EMIS) of Bhutan is well structured and extensive, there is generally a lack of EMIS data by key demographic variables such as disability, age and socio-economic status, etc. Similarly, inclusion of disability in EMIS is not disaggregated by gender and type and severity of disability nor by grades and level of education. This will apply to ECCD education subsector as well. The lack of data will affect achievement of Early Learning by not being able to expand for universal access as planned and provide quality ECCD services in places/locations as required, as well as not be able to provide the required specialized services. Also, the EMIS does not record enrolment information by type of centre/intervention. For example, it does not specify how many children are engaged through mobile ECCD centre programme and home-based ECCD interventions.⁴¹

Bhutan has used EMIS data and evidence sufficiently while formulating plans and policies. However, there are incidences where various reports and studies have raised concerns about the quality and reliability of Bhutan's data, for instance on disability. The lack of evidence will affect achievement of universal quality Early Learning aspirations during the 13th FYP in similar ways as discussed for lack of data here above.⁴²

The LEG, consistent with ITAP's recommendations, has identified that EMIS needs to be upgraded into a robust integrated data system, including key demographic variables such as disability (with type and severity), gender, age, grade/level of education, socio-economic status, etc., including for Early Learning by type of centre and interventions.

⁴¹ EFA by LEG (Dec 2022) and its assessment by ITAP (Mar 2023)

⁴² ibid

Availability of such robust data will help evidence-based decision-making. It will help in planning expansion for early learning universal access, and be able to provide quality ECCD services in the places/locations as required, including for specialized services. This will contribute immensely in system transformation in education, including in Early Learning.

Accordingly, implemented under the GPE/SCG programme, EMIS shall be upgraded into a robust integrated data system, including key demographic variables such as disability (with type and severity), gender, age, grade/level of education, socio-economic status, etc., including for Early Learning by type of centre and interventions. Availability of such robust data will help evidence-based decision-making. It will help in planning expansion for early learning universal access, and be able to provide quality ECCD services in the places/locations as required, including for specialized services. (Refer Table 9 below)

Output 4.2: Develop a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System for MoESD

As part of the education reform and restructuring undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), the former Education Monitoring Division (EMD) has been upgraded to Monitoring and Evaluation Division (MED), under the MoESD Secretariat with the Division Chief reporting to the Education Secretary. The mandates expanded to monitor indicators at the national level in addition to the provincial and school levels. Evaluation of programmes and projects is an additional role for this Division. While the School-based Performance Management System (SPMS) of the EMD is already integrated into the EMIS, there is a need to look at the central-level monitoring. Currently many Divisions operate in silos in the absence of a unified, single source of monitoring and evaluation platform, thereby perpetuating inefficiencies and duplications.

Similarly, the different departments under MoESD, including the newly merged Department of Workforce Planning and Skills Development do not have an integrated monitoring platform, resulting in uncoordinated approaches to programmes and projects. Frequency of monitoring using agreed-upon indicators is another challenge. The Monitoring and Evaluation Division, also serving as the Secretariat to the Ministry, will work closely with Policy and Planning Division (PPD) to optimize resources and avoid wasteful expenditure.

Evaluation function, which is the additional mandate of the division is new. There is no in-house capacity to undertake programme evaluations and the capacity gap needs to be filled. Knowledge creation is limited so far. For example, since the development of the Quality Monitoring Tool (QMTEC) in 2014, only one national quality monitoring report was published on ECCD. Review from the MoESD suggested that data was not consistent across the dzongkhags indicating a gap in either the tool itself or the implementation of the tool. Therefore, since 2021, the MoESD has tried to review the tools and also develop a web-based system based on the tool for easy use and access. End-users need to be trained in using the tools after it has been integrated with the EMIS.

This output, implemented under the GPE/SCG programme, shall result in development of a comprehensive online platform for divisions, Dzongkhags and Thromdes to plan and monitor all programmes, including ECCD and Non-Formal Education, in alignment with the overall goals of the MoESD. This will include the revision of GGSM (this will be done outside of the SCG by the MoESD-EMD) to update the school management guidelines in accordance with the current reforms.

An integrated Education Monitoring and Evaluation platform with current indicators of various Departments and Divisions of the MoESD in place, based on the mandates for Education Monitoring Division, shall lead to evidence-based planning, programming and decision-making of the MoESD.

Further, this action shall complement efforts in EMIS upgradation by way of improving system efficiency in monitoring, identifying training/capacity development needs, enhancing communication, QMTEC, etc. This effort will contribute greatly in transforming education system, to which Early Learning is a part of, through proper and timely monitoring, and timely interventions as required. (Refer Table 9 below)

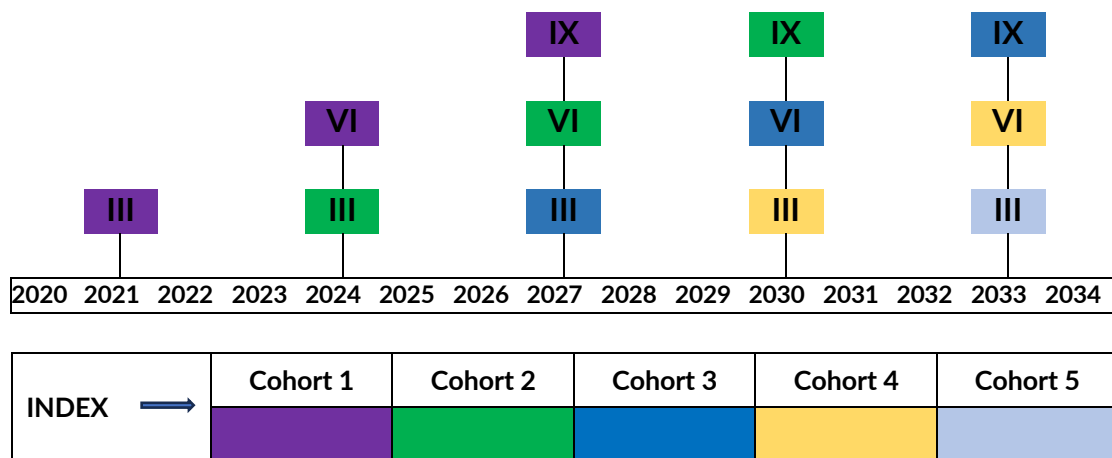
Output 4.3: Administration of National Education Assessment at grades III and VI in the core areas of learning

The National Education Assessment (NEA) is a large-scale assessment programme conducted by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA) at various key stages of student learning – grades III, VI and IX. NEA assesses the ability of students in using knowledge, skills, values and attitudes related to core school subjects (Dzongkha Reading and Writing Literacy, English Reading and Writing Literacy, Mathematical Literacy and Scientific Literacy). The assessment is intended to improve overall student learning achievement and enhancing the education system based on the evidence of what our students know and what they can do with that knowledge.

Apart from the recent NEA conducted in 2021, few rounds of NEA have been conducted earlier in various subjects at different grade levels, but there has been a limited usage of their findings in policy development due to various reasons. However, the NEA, 2021 was the first of its kind conducted by BCSEA using National Education Assessment Framework (NEAF) and technical support from Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), India under the Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG) funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The NEA exercise was a culmination of extensive collaboration and consultation among different stakeholders (GPE, SCI, UNICEF, ACER (India), MoE, REC, RUB, JSW Law School and BCSEA) and paved way for a systematic conduct of National Education Assessments periodically, so that the findings are comparable over time, across districts and subsequently with other countries within and outside the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in the long run. One of the objectives of the development of the National Education Assessment Framework was to allocate budgets for regular NEAs, which was not the case earlier.

The NEA is conducted in a three-year cycle approach (as shown in Figure 3 below). This triennial model approach serves two purposes simultaneously – on one hand, the same cohort of students can be tracked from grade III through grade IX and on the other, systemic interventions can be implemented and tracked through the years for evaluation purpose.

Figure 3: Three-year cycle of the National Education Assessment



The next round of NEA as per the assessment cycle given in the National Education Assessment Framework (NEAF) is scheduled for 2024 and it will assess the students of grades III and VI on the cognitive domain areas as reflected in Table 8 below.

Table 8: 2024 Grades III and VI NEA Cognitive Domain Areas

Grade III	Grade VI
Dzongkha Reading Literacy	Dzongkha Reading Literacy
	Dzongkha Writing Literacy
English Reading Literacy	English Reading Literacy
	English Writing Literacy
Mathematical Literacy	Mathematical Literacy
	Scientific Literacy

In addition, students will be assessed on the values and attitudes, and 21st Century Competencies which are aligned with the Nine Student attributes identified by the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024. The NEA also targets to address equity through the inclusion of Children with Disabilities (CWDs).

For better understanding of the factors affecting the student learning outcomes, including from children’s access to early learning (ECCD) programmes, the contextual questionnaires will be administered on students, teachers, principals, Chief Dzongkhag Education Officers (CDEOs) and Chief Thromde Education Officers.

NEA is a sample-based assessment in which a representative sample size is drawn and accordingly reported on the subgroups of interest. Each student will be required to complete only one booklet in each domain.

The National Education Assessment grades III and VI reports will inform policymaking, curriculum refinement, and teacher development, resulting in improved learning quality. It can also enhance transparency, accountability, and data-driven decision-making, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. NEA's benchmarking and progress tracking can offer insights into educational effectiveness, while strengthening parental engagement and quality assurance.

Administering the National Education Assessment (NEA) at grades III and VI in core learning areas has far-reaching positive implications to evaluate the education system and monitor the quality of learning outcome at the primary education. This effort will contribute towards education system transformation, including early learning education subsector.

Output 4.3 is planned to be implemented under the GPE/SCG programme during 2024 academic year. (Refer Table 9 below)

Output 4.4: Review of overall education sector expenditure and financing, including formula for budget allocations to help improve equity and efficiency of budget allocations.

Adequate and steady long-term investments in education are vital for reaping both immediate and sustainable benefits. This commitment ensures equitable access, high quality, and parity for all children, leading to positive outcomes on individual and communal scales. The significance of such investments lies in their capacity to facilitate personal development, bolster a country's human resource potential, and elevate global competitiveness.

The MoESD's assessment in 2021 indicates that the expenditure for the education sector, including early learning, as a share of total expenditure (excluding debt servicing) in financial year 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 exceeded 20% of total public expenditure. However, the budget for the education sector fell below 20% in the financial year 2020-2021 which may be due to the pandemic and subsequent closure of schools in 2020. Nevertheless, the MoESD is confident that Bhutan will be able to achieve the 20% share of public expenditure towards education for the next three years until FY 2024-2025.

Nonetheless, the current budget share to subsectors at decentralized levels appears excessively low for primary education. For instance, for the financial year 2019-2020, recurrent budget allocation for primary education was 3 per cent against 97 per cent for secondary. The financing scenario could be similar for ECCD. There needs to be realistic funding and resourcing for ECCD as with primary education. A public expenditure review could help the sector to identify them. To this end, a nuanced understanding of where and

when to allocate resources is vital. By employing effective mechanisms for resource distribution and implementing strategic reforms and interventions, the overall efficacy and efficiency of these investments can be significantly enhanced, yielding substantial and far-reaching returns. The SDG Mid-Term Reporting exercise being undertaken by MoESD will also throw some light on the progress and gaps, that will call for increased investment in the sector.

In view of the issues and challenges, a comprehensive review of the education sector's expenditure and financing, including the budget allocation formula, is planned to be carried out. This comprehensive review can lead to equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that different regions and schools receive fair funding. Moreover, it will enable efficient utilization of resources by identifying areas of improvement and streamlining funding for educational initiatives. The outcome can be more targeted interventions that address specific challenges, ultimately enhancing the quality of education through investments in teacher training, curriculum development, and infrastructure.

Additionally, such a review can promote transparency, accountability, and data-driven decision-making. By analyzing expenditure data, policymakers can make informed choices, prioritize areas that require increased funding, and plan effectively. As a result, educational inequalities can be reduced, stakeholders' perspectives can be integrated, and policies adjusted to align with evolving needs. Ultimately, this holistic review process contributes to a more equitable, efficient, and responsive education system that benefits students and communities alike.

Output 4.4 is planned to be implemented under the GPE/SCG programme as reflected in Table 9 below.

Output 4.5: Self-evaluation/Analysis of Education Sector Coordination Meeting (ESCM)/Local Education Group (LEG) to help strategize for further strengthening of the functioning of the ESCM/LEG

Bhutan is relatively small in size and population with limited presence of developmental partners. Despite this, agencies work in silos, while information sharing is still a challenge. This leads to conflicting policies, duplication of efforts and resources which hinder the effective delivery of educational programmes and services. Enhanced efficiency of the education policy implementation, coordination, consolidation, and collaboration among various stakeholders are the fundamental principles to achieve all the goals, strategies, and programmes of the current 12th FYP and the new 13th FYP.

To address these issues, the Education Sector Coordination Meeting (ESCM) was instituted in early 2018. The ESCM has clear terms of reference and is co-chaired by the MoESD Secretary and UNICEF Representative. It acts as the Local Education Group (LEG). The ESCM supports the realisation of common goals and aspirations by strengthening coordination, collaboration, and partnership among the MoESD, relevant government agencies, development partners, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and

representatives of parents' organisations. However, meetings are not always regular and CSO's participation is limited. ESCM has not conducted a self-evaluation since its foundation and while there are no major issues now, the challenges in sector coordination may affect the achievement of education and early learning aspirations. There is a need to revitalize the ESCM/LEG and gear towards Joint Sector Reviews for the long-term sustainability of commitments from development partners and for better harmonization and coherence of interventions.

Conducting a self-evaluation and strategic planning process within ESCM/LEG can lead to positive outcomes such as enhanced effectiveness, optimized coordination, inclusive participation, and improved accountability through the development of mechanisms for joint reviews of education performance and project implementation plans. A revitalized ESCM/LEG with regular meetings and revised ToR will contribute collectively to a more efficient and impactful education coordination, benefiting the overall educational landscape.

Output 4.5 is planned to be implemented under the GPE/SCG programme as reflected in Table 9 below.

Output 4.6: Capacity Development – Planning, Monitoring

EFA has revealed that there is need to strengthen capacity at various levels in the education system in delivering the ECCD programme, including the need to develop or strengthen capacity and practices at the local level, ECCD monitors from parent schools and focal DEOs/TEOs, MoESD officials on planning, monitoring, and project coordination, a need for an ECCD monitoring tool linked to EMIS. Accordingly, the following actions shall be implemented under the funding/grant sources as indicated against each output activity.

1) *Strengthening capacity and practices of planning at the local level*

Capacity and practices of planning at the local level (i.e., Dzongkhag and Thromde) shall be strengthened for effective implementation of ECCD interventions at the decentralized level. This action will contribute towards system transformation as it has the potential for effective implementation of interventions at local level through proper planning and practices.

Implemented under SCG, a total of 434 Local Government (LG) officials, i.e., 205 Gups, 205 Mangmis, and 24 DEOs shall benefit from this output activity.

2) *Enhancing capacity of ECCD monitors from parent schools and focal DEOs/TEOs*

An effective system must have a robust monitoring mechanism in place. Competent ECCD monitors will contribute towards Early Learning system transformation. Implemented under WB's PforR, training on monitoring of ECCD centres shall be

provided to enhance monitoring capacity of a total of 450 monitors from parent schools and focal DEOs/TEOs.

3) Monitoring of ECCD centres

Implemented under WB's PforR, focal monitors and programme managers trained under output activity in (2) above shall monitor 583 ECCD centres, including 462 public, 61 private, 19 workplace based, 4 NGOs, 24 mobile and 13 HBI during the period of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy.

4) Capacity development for MoESD officials

Capacity of the relevant MoESD officials shall be strengthened on planning, monitoring, and project coordination, including for Early Learning subsector. Strengthened capacity at the central agency level would contribute towards system transformation through proper planning, monitoring and coordination.

Implemented under GPE/MG programme, capacity of 20 (3 ECCD Programme officers, 4 Planning officers, 1 HRO, 1 Procurement officer, 1 Accountant, 4 project staff, 1 Finance Officer, 3 EMOs, 1 Statistician, and Secretary & DG/DSE) relevant MoESD officials shall be strengthened.

5) Development of web based ECCD monitoring tool linked to EMIS

Implemented under UNICEF AWP, a web-based monitoring tool (QMTEC), including tracking ECCD centre quality standards, for the ECCD programme has been developed and being implemented in the system. This tool shall be linked to the EMIS during implementation of output 4.1 above.

Refer Output 4.6 activities in Table 9 below.

Output 4.7: Development of a ECCD Programme Strategic Action Plan

Implemented under WB's PforR, an ECCD Strategic Action Plan has been developed for strengthening the professionalization of ECCD. This is as indicated in the Results Framework (Annexure 2). (Refer Table 9 below)

Output 4.8: Strengthening capacity of lower primary schools to address the needs of 6-8-year-old children.

Early childhood care and development extends from zero to eight years. While the needs of the 3-5-year-old children are addressed through the centre-based ECCD programme, the needs of the 6-8-year-old children needs to be addressed through lower primary school system. Any programme that is designed for early learning needs to be extended to the 6-8-year-old children in lower primary schools and/or schools with lower primary levels.

Implemented under GPE/SCG programme and WB PforR, the following three activities shall be extended to some of the lower primary schools and/or schools with lower primary levels in the country as part of implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy for early learning.

(a) Development and modelling of a reading programme in lower primary levels (PP to Class 3)

Exposure to early reading contributes to children's foundational learning. There is enough research evidence of the role of reading in enhancing children's learning outcomes at later stages. In Bhutan, limited access to age-appropriate books, a lack of reading culture, and language barriers hinder children's engagement with reading materials. Additionally, factors such as the quality of reading materials, assessment-oriented teaching methods, and limited parental engagement contribute to the issue. These challenges collectively impede the development of strong reading habits and critical thinking skills among children. This GPE/SCG programme will address these gaps targeting initially children in classes PP to III.

Addressing these concerns requires a multi-pronged approach, including advocacy and sensitization on the importance of early reading as a foundational literacy skill. The development of a relevant intervention focusing on the needs of young learners is necessary. To address this, a tailor made comprehensive Early Literacy Package should be developed to make reading a fun experience for all young learners. This will also help ensure that the package becomes a part of the annual school programme.

The proposed reading programme will provide insights and lessons learnt for the improvement of the reading instruction and practices. Implementing strategies to address children's reading challenges in Bhutan can yield a transformative outcome. By promoting a culture of reading, providing accessible and relevant materials, training educators, and involving parents, Bhutan can nurture a generation of enthusiastic readers equipped with improved literacy skills, critical thinking abilities, and a lifelong love for learning. This outcome not only enhances educational achievements but also contributes to the holistic development of children, fostering curiosity, creativity, and a broader understanding of the world around them.

This shall result in sensitization on the importance of early reading as a foundational literacy skill through media platforms. There shall also be in place a tailor made comprehensive Early Literacy Package as part of the annual school programme.

Output 48 (a) activities shall be implemented under GPE/SCG programme as per Table 9 below.

(b) Strengthening climate change and resilience building programme – Pilot in a highland school

Background:

During the Mid-Year Review of the Programme for Results (PforR) projects, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) proposed a revision to Disbursement Linked Indicator (DLI) number four, which initially focused on "Building Climate Change resilience through the education system." The suggested modification involves restructuring the DLI to emphasize the implementation of climate-resilient schools, shifting the focus from general awareness of climate changes within schools. This proposal is particularly relevant given the vulnerability of highland schools in Bhutan to extreme weather events, temperature fluctuations, and energy scarcity. Schools in these high-altitude areas often face early closures and delayed openings due to challenging climatic conditions. To address these issues effectively, there is a need for a comprehensive approach that not only builds climate resilience in schools but also raises awareness about climate change and its impact on the learning environment.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Enhanced Climate Resilience:** Highland schools in Bhutan will be better equipped to withstand extreme weather conditions, enabling them to remain open for longer durations and promoting a conducive learning environment for students.
- **Improved Energy Efficiency:** The upgraded windows, double-glazed windows, airtight seals, and solar panels will significantly improve energy efficiency in schools, reducing energy consumption and operational costs.
- **Climate Change Awareness:** Integration of climate change education into the curriculum will raise awareness among students about the impacts of climate change and the importance of environmental conservation.
- **Reduced Carbon Footprint:** The use of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, will lower the carbon footprint of the schools, contributing to a more sustainable future.

Project Location:

The MoESD has decided to implement a pilot programme in one of the primary schools. The project will be prioritizing highland schools in Bhutan based on their vulnerability to climate change and their need for immediate attention.

Project Timeline:

The project is scheduled to begin implementation in the next financial year, which commences in 2024 and end by January 2025.

Budget and Funding:

Funding for the climate resilience programme will be allocated according to the "Building Climate Change Resilience through Education System" disbursement linked indicator. The total allocated amount for this initiative is US\$ 1.0 million. The budget allocation for each of the selected school will be on the following components:

- 1. Installing and procuring of the additional facilities:** The budget estimates of about Nu. 14,097,410 is required for one school. The MoESD has calculated the tentative cost and additional cost may be incurred based on the number of the classrooms.
- 2. Training and capacity building:** To sustain the projects, the school will be trained so that they can maintain and repair the outputs of the projects. The primary goal of the training programme is to empower school staff and Technical Training Institutes (TTIs) with the knowledge and skills necessary to independently maintain and repair the climate resilience projects, specifically focusing on climate resilience.

Project implementing agencies:

The pilot project shall be implemented jointly by the two departments of the MoESD. While the Department of School Education shall issue directives, provide oversight and compliance, and collaboration, Department of Workforce Planning and Skills Development shall be responsible for engagement of TTI trainees, teachers, and staff, training sustainable skill development, and capacity building during implementation of the pilot project.

The pilot project shall be implemented under the PforR programme.

(Refer Table 9 below)

(c) Strengthening WASH programme

Investing in safe Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities is a key initiative navigating the entire educational range, catering to the diverse needs of children from early childhood (ECCD) programmes to Special Education Needs (SEN) schools and public primary and secondary schools. This strategic investment prioritises the well-being and educational success of children through the following features:

- **ECCD:** Constructing age-appropriate, accessible WASH facilities within ECCD programmes promotes hygiene awareness, healthy development, and lays a robust foundation for future learning.
- **Schools with Special Education Needs programmes:** Prioritising accessible WASH infrastructure in SEN schools empowers students with disabilities, ensuring inclusivity, enhancing health and well-being, and fostering confidence and dignity.
- **Primary Schools:** Addressing challenges such as open defecation and shared toilets through adequate sanitation facilities creates a safer, more dignified learning

environment. This especially benefits girls, positively impacting their education and contributing to ECCD goals.

- Overall Learning Experience: Envisioning schools with conducive WASH facilities minimizes distractions, enhances hygiene practices, and nurtures a positive atmosphere. This supports a holistic learning experience aligned with ECCD principles.
- Promoting Gender Equality and Community Health: Equitable access to WASH facilities promotes gender equality, ensuring privacy and dignity for everyone. Beyond school boundaries, fostering better hygiene practices among students contributes to improved community health.

Crucially, the early years (0 to 8 years) are the most extraordinary period of growth and development in a child's lifetime. The foundations of all learning are laid during these years. By giving priority to their WASH needs, we invest in their overall well-being, creating a foundation for success within ECCD scopes. This holistic approach to WASH aligns with early learning, cultivating healthier, more inclusive, and fair learning environments for every child. The Health and Well-being Division, Department of Education Programmes, through GPE-Multiplier grant, actively engages primary schools focusing on the early learning.

During the period of WB's PforR programme, 12 schools with lower primary levels across the country shall be supported with the WASH facilities. Refer Table 9 below and Results Framework (Annex 2) for details.

Table 9: Output activities under system capacity building

Output No.	Output Activity	GPE		WB (P4R)	UNICEF (AWP)	Total
		SCG	MG			
4.1	Upgradation of Education Management Information System (EMIS) into a robust integrated data system, including key demographic variables such as disability (with type and severity), gender, age, grade/level of education, socio-economic status, etc., including for Early Learning by type of centre and interventions.	Upgrading EMIS	-	-	-	Upgrading EMIS
4.2	Development of Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) System for MoESD.	M&E System	-	-	-	M&E System
4.3	Administration of NEA at grades III and VI in the core areas of learning.	Grades III & VI	-	-	-	Grades III & VI
4.4	Review the overall education sector expenditure and financing, including formula for budget allocations to help improve equity and efficiency of budget allocations.	Overall education sector expenditure review	-	-	-	Overall education sector expenditure review
4.5	ESCM/LEG self-evaluation/ analysis for further strengthening its functioning.	ESCM/ LEG self-evaluation /analysis	-	-	-	ESCM/ LEG self-evaluation /analysis
4.6	Capacity Development – Planning, Monitoring					

	1) Strengthening capacity and practices of at local levels (dzongkhag and Gewog stakeholders) on ECCD.	434 ⁴³	-	-	-	434
	2) Enhancing capacity of ECCD monitors from parent schools and focal DEOs/TEOs.	-	-	450	-	450
	3) Monitoring of ECCD centres by focal monitors and programme managers.	-	-	583 ⁴⁴	-	583
	4) Capacity development for relevant MoESD officials.	-	Relevant MoESD officials	-	-	Relevant MoESD officials
	5) Development of web-based ECCD monitoring tool linked to EMIS.	-	-	-	Linked to EMIS	Linked to EMIS
4.7	Development of a strategic action plan as per education reform strategy.	-	-	Developed	-	Developed
4.8	Strengthening capacity of lower primary schools to address the needs of 6-8-year-old children.					
	a) Development and modelling of a reading programme in lower primary levels (PP to Class 3)	Comp. Early Literacy Package		-	-	Comp. Early Literacy Package
	b) Strengthening climate change and resilience building programme – pilot in a highland school.	-	-	1 highland primary school (pilot)	-	1 highland primary school (pilot)
	c) Strengthening WASH programme.	-	-	12 lower primary schools	-	12 lower primary schools

⁴³ 434 = 205 Gups, 205 Mangmis, and 24 DEOs

⁴⁴ 583 = 462 Existing public ECCD Centres, 61 private, 19 workplace based, 24 mobile, 13 HBI, and 4 NGO

Cross-Cutting Themes:

Two cross-cutting themes in this Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy are (1) *Gender Equality and Inclusion* and (2) *Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH)*, addressed under Outcomes A and B.

Outcome A: A strong foundation for gender equality and inclusion laid in the ECCD programme.

Gender Equality

There are no strong gender differences in ECCD (MoE & UNICEF, 2020). However, gender norms and stereotypes are still a concern.⁴⁵ It may be highlighted that ECCD provides a unique opportunity to build strong foundations for gender equality and that gender transformative ECCD is pivotal to promoting equal rights for both boys and girls (MoE & UNICEF, 2020). International research has shown that ECCD programmes can be gender transformative upon meeting the following conditions (MoE & UNICEF, 2020:88):

- i) Provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to experience high quality nurturing care;
- ii) Support the development of egalitarian values and expectations;
- iii) Allow children to experience and participate in what are considered “gendered” activities;
- iv) Generate awareness among caregivers and ECCD facilitators about the harmful sequel of gender stereotyping and inadvertent or deliberate gender discrimination;
- v) Encourage fathers to become more involved in the upbringing of their children;
- vi) Support the employment of men as ECCD facilitators; and
- vii) Empower mothers and female caregivers and support their rights to adequate nutrition, health, education, and freedom from violence.

While aspects of gender equality are expected to be embedded in the activities/outputs across ECCD programme, strengthening gender mainstreaming activities/outputs will be undertaken, including for gender responsive planning and gender related studies, along with a strengthened monitoring system to conduct analysis at strategic level. (Refer Annexure A for details) Further, the gender transformative enabling conditions stated above are very important to create such conditions in ECCD.

Inclusion

It is a national policy that all ECCD centres must address the needs of all children aged 36 – 71 months and be inclusive of gender, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or

⁴⁵ Any major studies on gender in Bhutan makes references to this, such as by *Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors* by ADB in partnership with NCWC and UN Bhutan CO in 2014.

location (Draft NEP⁴⁶; MoE, 2019). Standards for Inclusive Education (MoE, 2017) detail the culture, policies and teaching and staffing practices necessary to support inclusion.

A study as part of ECCD Evaluation (MoE & UNICEF, 2020) reported that more than one child in ten had a special need of some type, which is also evidenced from the national data indicating high prevalence rate of disability among young children⁴⁷. This points to the urgent need for inclusive education as well as to ensure that crèche caregivers, ECCD facilitators, health workers and primary school teachers are equipped to support the participation of children with special needs. The study noted that the provision of targeted professional development required urgent investment. However, the recent *Assessment of ECCD Centres in Bhutan Report* (SCI, 2023) noted that “none of the ECCD centres in the study site were disability-friendly nor were the facilitators trained on inclusivity” (p.12).

As with gender equality, while inclusion is expected to be embedded in the activities/outputs across ECCD programme, capacity of crèche caregivers, ECCD facilitators, health workers and lower primary school teachers shall be equipped to support the participation of children with special needs. (Refer Annexure A for details)

Output A1: Advocacy on gender and capacity building of gender focal persons at the central and district level on gender mainstreaming

According to the Annual Education Statistics, there are no strong gender differences in school or ECCD enrolment, however, gender norms and stereotypes are still a concern. Traditional societal expectations and the influence of gender roles on parental involvement further contribute to gender-related issues in ECCD. The lack of capacity for gender mainstreaming, including for gender responsive planning, also hinders targeted interventions at the policy level. Overcoming these challenges requires a holistic approach, involving advocacy at various levels, targeted training, community engagement, and effective policy implementation to create a more inclusive and equitable early childhood education environment in Bhutan. At the primary and secondary levels gender parity has improved over the years and there is no marked difference. However, gender parity may not always lead to gender equality in terms of outcomes. More efforts are required to identify barriers that put boys and girls at a disadvantage in terms of curriculum content, pedagogical practices, participation in STEM subjects and TVET. Transition of girls to higher education, including in professional courses, needs to be addressed. There is no data on out of school children disaggregated by sex and this needs to be addressed too.

Gender will be mainstreamed into strategic level analysis, planning and monitoring through advocacy and capacity building of key stakeholders.

Strengthening gender mainstreaming can promote gender equality through balanced enrollment, improved retention, and completion rates for all students. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, children will have the opportunity to

⁴⁶ Draft National Education Policy 2019

⁴⁷ 2016 GNHC’s vulnerability baseline assessment identified children with disabilities as a vulnerable group.

develop holistically without being constrained by traditional gender roles. This will result in enhanced educational outcomes, improved social and emotional well-being, and increased self-confidence for both boys and girls. Over time, breaking down gender stereotypes in ECCD can contribute to a more gender-equal society by nurturing individuals who are open-minded, respectful of diversity, and empowered to pursue their interests and goals without constraints based on gender.

Output A1 shall be implemented under the GPE/SCG programme as reflected in Table 10 below.

Output A2: Embedding Gender Equality and Inclusion across activities and outputs

Generally, as a norm, during the period of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy and the 13th FYP, aspects of gender equality and inclusion shall be embedded in the activities and outputs across ECCD programme within the framework of this Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy and the 13th FYP and beyond.

Specifically, all training/ professional development programmes, such as the PGDE, diploma, bridging, basic training, parenting education, orientation programmes, refresher courses, etc., shall include, among others, gender aspects/elements and inclusive education, in their training/professional development programmes so that ECCD facilitators/teachers are competent enough to:

- i) Provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to experience high quality nurturing care;
- ii) Support the development of egalitarian values and expectations;
- iii) Allow children to experience and participate in what are considered “gendered” activities;
- iv) Understand and be aware of the harmful sequel of gender stereotyping and inadvertent or deliberate gender discrimination;
- v) Encourage fathers to become more involved in the upbringing of their children; and
- vi) Support participation of children with disabilities.

Similarly, orientation and/training programmes for the principals from parent schools, district/municipal education offices, etc., shall also include the above gender and inclusion elements, among others, so that they are able to monitor such critical elements and provide support as needed. Additionally, the district/municipal offices shall be encouraged to support employment of more men as ECCD facilitators and support empowering mothers and female caregivers in fulfilling the rights of children to adequate nutrition, health, education, and freedom from violence. They should be equipped to ensure that standards for inclusive education are adhered to in the ECCD centres, including culture, policies and teaching and staffing practices necessary to support inclusion, as well as that the facilities developed are gender friendly and accessible to children with disabilities.

Table 10: Output activities under Gender Equality and Inclusion

Output No.	Activity	GPE			WB (P4R)	SCI	Total
		STG	MG	SCG			
A1	Advocacy on gender and capacity building of gender focal points (GFP) at the central and district level on gender mainstreaming.	-	-	GFP @ central & district levels.	-	-	GFP @ central & district levels.
A2	1. Embedding gender equality and inclusion across all activities and outputs as applicable and relevant.	Across all outputs and activities as applicable and relevant.					

Outcome B: Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) ensured in the ECCD programme.

There are child protection risks associated with any school-level intervention where there would be adults interacting with children. ECCD centre level interventions may have similar risks. Therefore, as per GPE's SEAH Policy and requirements of the national laws and regulations, the following output activity/activities are planned for implementation during the period of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy.

Output B1: Embedding SEAH awareness and orientation across all professional development and training programmes, and other activities and outputs as relevant.

All actions, either collectively or individually, of people involved in the implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy shall be governed by the –

- a. *Childcare and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011 (CCPA2011) (PoB)*⁴⁸
- b. *Childcare and Protection Rules and Regulations of Bhutan 2015 (CCPRR 2015 – Revised). (NCWC)*
- c. *Teachers Code of Code (MoESD) and Code of conduct of ECCD Facilitators (ECCD&SEN, MoESD)*
- d. *Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy.*
- e. *Operational Guidelines for Early Childhood care and Development Centres. (ECCD&SEN, MoESD)*

Accordingly, SEAH shall form part and parcel of all training and professional development programmes, namely, ECCD basic training programme for new facilitators, refresher courses, 3-year mixed mode diploma programme in ECCD, Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in ECCD, Bridging programme for B.Ed degree, parenting education, and other relevant activities within the framework of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy. The content of the orientation and awareness shall be based on

⁴⁸ Parliament of Bhutan.

relevant sections of the above laws, rules and regulations, frameworks, codes, and guidelines. Additionally, the content will also include orientation on available standard operating procedures, reporting mechanisms, and child protection services. Awareness and orientation shall also include GPE's *Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy* (May 2021), particularly of sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5, and others as relevant, and relevant provisions from the Child Rights Convention (CRC).

Table 11: Output activities under SEAH

Output Activity	GPE			WB (P4R)	SC	Total
	STG	SCG	MG			
B1. Embedding awareness and orientation on SEAH and child protection components into all professional development and training programmes, and other activities and outputs as relevant.	Across all professional development and training programme outputs and activities as applicable and relevant.					

4. Sustainability, Risks, and Mitigation Strategies

4.1. Sustainability

Even though the ECCD programme started back in 2003 (MoE, 2014)⁴⁹, access to early learning by 3-5-year-old children in 2023 indicated a low (MoE & UNICEF, 2020)⁵⁰ NER at 37.66% (GER 54.47%) coverage. This is because a comprehensive ECCD plan with adequate strategies has not been part of any of the past Five-Year Plans of the country; neither is it the case during the current 12th FYP (2018-2023). Therefore, it is not surprising that the ECCD evaluation report (MoE & UNICEF, 2020) should find that there was a lack of a common understanding of ECCD and its benefits among stakeholders, as well as gaps in planning, implementation, budgeting, and coordination. This primarily has resulted in the lack of enabling environment, including inadequate human (both in numbers and competencies), material, and financial resources (MoE & UNICEF, 2020).⁵¹

However, going forward, the RGoB proposes to prioritize Early Learning during the 13th Five Year Plan (2024-2029), with an ambitious target of achieving 100% access to 3-5-year-old children by 2029 (RGoB, 2022),⁵² at least one year ahead of SDG4.2 2030 target. There is political will and commitment to provide universal access to quality ECCD programme for all 3-5-year-old children henceforth. This political will is backed up with commitment for adequate financial resources for expanded access; professionalizing the ECCD programme through professional upgradation of human resources; strengthening curriculum and learning resources, standards, and guidelines; creating environments that are safe and secure, caring and protective, and supportive for holistic development of the child.

In its efforts to achieving universal access to ECCD programme for 3-5-year-old children by 2029, the RGoB who bears mostly the recurrent costs, is supported by GPE through its System Capacity Grant (US\$ 1.0 million – implemented through UNICEF), Multiplier Grant (US\$ 3.3 million – implemented through WB), and System Transformation Grant (US\$ 5.0 million); WB through its Programme for Results (PforR, US\$4.0 million); UNICEF through its 2 AWP (US\$ 5.285 million); and SCI (US\$ 1.627 m). [Refer Annexure A for details].

The ECCD programme is spearheaded by a dedicated division, the ECCD & SEN Division (ECCD&SEN) within the Department of School Education (DSE), Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD). The programme is implemented by the local governments (LG) – Dzongkhags and Thromdes – through the Dzongkhag/Thromde Education Offices. There are dedicated Education Officers for the ECCD programme within each Dzongkhag or Thromde. The LG education offices are also assisted by the parent schools for each of the ECCD centres. Besides, the programme is also monitored by Education Monitoring Division (EMD) of the MoESD.

⁴⁹ Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 (p.17)

⁵⁰ An Evaluation of ECCD in Bhutan 2020, MoE & UNICEF Bhutan CO.

⁵¹ An Evaluation of ECCD in Bhutan 2020, MoE & UNICEF Bhutan CO.

⁵² Long-Term Plan and 13th Plan, RGoB, December 2, 2022 (PPT)

Further, the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy shall be implemented as described under section 5 below.

In view of the above, the ECCD programme will not only be sustainable but henceforth successful.

4.2. Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Fiduciary Risks:

The construction and expansion of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centres in Bhutan may entail fiduciary risks related to financial management, procurement, and governance. Despite decentralizing construction-related works to the districts, there is consistent adherence to financial accountability procedures and rules across all districts.

To mitigate these inherent risks, Bhutan has implemented robust systems such as the Multi-Year Rolling Budget (MYRB), Public Expenditure Management System (PEMS), Procurement Rules and Regulation 2023, and the Electronic Government Procurement (e-GP) System. These measures aim to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in procurement processes in line with Bhutan's ongoing Public Finance Management (PFM) reforms and to ensure funds are used for their intended purposes.

Furthermore, the deposit works system is coupled with stringent control measures, where the central agency releases funds only upon completion of feasibility studies, and disbursements are contingent on demonstrated progress in both financial and physical aspects of the projects. Additionally, implementing districts are required to submit monthly progress reports to the central agency, further ensuring accountability and oversight.

Fiduciary risks mitigation strategies are provided in Table 12 below (Risk Types – 1 – 3).

Child Protection Risks – Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH):

There are child protection risks associated with any school-level intervention where there would be adults interacting with children. ECCD centre level interventions may have similar risks. Therefore, all actions, either collectively or individually, of people involved in the implementation of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy shall be governed by the –

- a. *Childcare and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011 (CCPA2011) (PoB)*⁵³
- b. *Childcare and Protection Rules and Regulations of Bhutan 2015 (CCPRR 2015 – Revised). (NCWC)*
- c. *Teachers Code of Code (MoESD) and Code of conduct of ECCD Facilitators (ECCD&SEN, MoESD)*
- d. *Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy.*

⁵³ Parliament of Bhutan.

e. *Operational Guidelines for Early Childhood care and Development Centres.* (ECCD&SEN, MoESD)

Accordingly, SEAH shall form part and parcel of all training and professional development programmes, namely, ECCD basic training programme for new facilitators, refresher courses, 3-year mixed mode diploma programme in ECCD, Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in ECCD, Bridging programme for B.Ed degree, parenting education, and other relevant activities within the framework of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy. The content of the orientation and awareness shall be based on relevant sections of the above laws, rules and regulations, frameworks, codes, and guidelines. Additionally, the content will also include orientation on available standard operating procedures, reporting mechanisms, and child protection services. Awareness and orientation shall also include GPE's *Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy* (May 2021), particularly of sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5, and others as relevant, and relevant provisions from the Child Rights Convention (CRC).

Risk mitigation strategies associated with SEAH that may affect implementation of Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy (PCIS) are provided in Table 12 below (Risk Type 4).

Broader Potential Risks:

Further, there are some broader potential risks facing the education sector that may affect the implementation of the PCIS. The identified broader potential risks and their mitigation strategies are reflected in the Table 12 below (Risk Types 5 – 9).

Table 12: Fiduciary and Broader Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Risk Types	Potential magnitude of the risk	Likelihood of the risk	Mitigation Strategies
Fiduciary Risks			
1) Financial Management	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of robust financial management systems such as MYRB and PEMS. • Utilization of deposit works system, where funds are released upon completion of feasibility studies and demonstrated progress. • Regular monitoring and reporting of financial activities.
2) Procurement	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e-GP System and annual procurement plan in place to enhance transparency and accountability in procurement processes.
3) Governance	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening governance mechanisms through enhanced oversight and accountability measures. • Implementation of control mechanisms to ensure compliance with regulations and guidelines. • Education officers and Finance Officers of districts will be oriented on the progress and financial reporting.

Child Protection Risks

4) Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH)	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed SEAH awareness and orientation across all professional development and training programmes, and other activities and outputs as relevant. The content will also include orientation on available standard operating procedures, reporting mechanisms, and child protection services (Refer Output B1 above)
Broader Potential Risks			
5) Inadequate trained full time ECCD facilitators available for the newly established ECCD centres.	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expediate regularization of ECCD facilitators. • Pursue intakes into Diploma, PGDE, & Bridging programmes. • Secure entry positions for PGDE & Diploma at P5 & S2 respectively.
6) RCSC may not approve the PGDE Programme.	Moderate	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy at the highest level • If PGDE does not come through, reprogramming exercise will be undertaken.
7) Natural disasters (Earthquake, Flashfloods, Fire hazards, etc.)	Moderate	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the disaster management and preparedness capacity development programme and plan to ECCD programme. • Put in place disaster risk mitigation plan in place. • Ensure compliance of the ECCD centres with the building disaster-risk reduction standards. • Build capacity of ECCD Division and Facilitators.
8) COVID-19 like pandemic can disrupt ECCD programme	Moderate	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based interventions • Virtual support for parents by ECCD facilitators • Support to facilitators from the centre.
9) COVID-19 like pandemic can delay constructions of ECCD centres; there can be cost escalation too.	Moderate	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As far as possible use locally available construction materials and local contractors. • Reprogramming, including reducing scope of the expansion.

5. Programme Implementation Arrangements

5.1. Overview

The Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy will be fully implemented using the government systems and processes. The RGoB has been implementing large-scale education projects funded by external partners through its well-established and transparent government mechanisms and has demonstrated sufficient capacity to handle the additional financial flow from the proposed GPE/STG Programme.

The MoESD, in close collaboration with Grant Agents (GAs) – SCI (STG), UNICEF (SCG), and WB (MG) – will be responsible for ensuring successful implementation of the GPE STG/SCG/MG programmes, either in collaboration, in partnership, and/or on their own depending on the nature/design of the output activities. These shall take place within the overall implementation frameworks and processes of the 13th FYP of the MoESD/RGoB. At the national level, the 13th FYP implementation will be monitored by the Strategic Planning Division (SPD) under the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (OPMC), earlier known as the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC). At the ministry level, the Policy and Planning Division (PPD) is responsible for the management and monitoring of the implementation of the 13th FYP of the Education Sector, including the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes. PPD is also responsible for donor coordination.

PPD will serve as the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) with Chief Planning Officer as the Programme Manager. He/She will be assisted by a Programme Coordinator for the day-to-day management of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes. The Secretary of the MoESD shall provide oversight and overall direction for GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes implementation.

The GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes will be implemented through the ECCD and SEN Division (ECCD&SEN) of the Department of School Education, MoESD and its decentralized structures such as *Dzongkhag* and *Thromde* Education Offices. The management of the implementation of the components and outcomes will be the responsibility of the Chief of ECCD & SEN Division of MoESD with a programme manager for day-to-day management.

The following will be the specific roles of each of the agencies involved in managing, supervising, and monitoring the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes implementation:

5.2. Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD)

The main role and functions of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) shall be to:

- Carry out day-to-day management of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes in close coordination with the Coordinating Agency (CA) and Grant Agents (GAs), including the GPE Secretariat.

- Provide overall direction and support for the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes implementation.
- Ensure coherence and complementarity of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes with other relevant projects and programmes under the MoESD.
- Monitor the progress of the implementation of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes on quarterly basis and submit Quarterly Progress Reports (both narrative on programme activity and financial on programme expenditures) to the GAs.
- As is the existing practice, the Quarterly Progress Reports (QPRs) as well as other reports will be routed through the SPD to the GAs. SPD will review the reports, provide feedback to PCU of PPD if required and forward the reports to the GAs as is the existing practice. The GAs will provide feedback on the reports to PCU through the SPD.
- Coordinate and resolve any programme implementation issues.
- Take the lead to coordinate review meetings and report on the status of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programme implementation during the Programme Review Committee meetings.
- Prepare and submit annual programme review reports to the GAs with copy endorsed to the CA.
- Present the annual review report on the status of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programme implementation to the LEG/ ESCM mentioned below in coordination with the CA.

5.3. Programme Implementation

The ECCD and SEN Division of the Department School Education, MoESD shall:

- Take the lead in implementing the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes in close coordination with the *Dzongkhag/Thromde* Education Offices/Local Governments.
- Take the responsibility for managing, monitoring and reporting (both narrative on programme activity and financial on programme expenditure) on progress quarterly to the PPD (GPE Programme Coordinator).
- The GPE Programme Manager of ECCD & SEN Division will be the contact point for reporting to PCU as well as for any information related to the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes.

5.4. Programme Review Committee

The existing joint biannual, the midterm and the end of Project/ Programme Review Committee meetings of the MoESD, SCI, UNICEF, and WB will be used as the Programme Review platform to carry out the joint reviews of the progress of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes implementation, including identification of challenges, and discuss implementation issues as necessary so that the activities could be implemented within the timeframe of the action. All the meetings will be documented and the progress shared with the LEG/ESCM members on annual basis or as needed.

The bi-annual review meeting, the mid-term and the end of Programme Review meetings will be chaired by the Director General of the Department of School Education, the MoESD. The members of the Programme Review Committee shall comprise of:

1. Director General, Dept. of School Education, MoESD (Chair)
2. Save the children (STG Grant Agent)
3. UNICEF (SCG Grant Agent)
4. World Bank (MG Grant Agent)
5. Policy and Planning Division, MoESD
6. ECCD & SEN Division, DSE, MoESD
7. Finance Section, Division of Services, MoESD
8. Department of Micro-Fiscal and Development Finance, Ministry of Finance (World Bank Focal, Save the child focal, UNICEF focal)
9. LEG member representative (other than listed above).

5.5. The Grant Agents (GAs)

GPE has three Grants for Bhutan – System Transformation Grant (STG), System Capacity Grant (SCG), and Multiplier Grant (MG). Each has its own Grant Agent.

Save the Children US (SCUS) is the GPE/STG Grant Agent (GA) and Save the Children International (SCI) Bhutan CO will implement the GPE/STG Programme (2024-2028) in Bhutan. Similarly, UNICEF is the Grant Agent for GPE/SCG Programme, and World Bank is the Grant Agent for the GPE/MG Programme.

Grant Agents will facilitate the Grant Application including planning and budgeting in close collaboration with the Bhutan Field Offices as applicable, for fund transfers, activity implementation, monitoring and evaluation, preparation and submission of reports to all concerned including the GPE Secretariat. The GAs will prepare reports with input from the Bhutan Field Offices as applicable and the MoESD and submit to GPE secretariat as per the required frequency.

The Bhutan Field Offices, as applicable, will appoint GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR Programme Managers who will be responsible for overall management of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR Programme. In addition, the GAs will appoint a GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR Programme Coordinators who will look after the day-to-day implementation and ensure timely implementation and effective management of the programmes. Further, GAs will also provide technical support during implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes.

On the GPE fund Management, GAs will follow the existing partnership modality(ies). Under such modality(ies) GAs will execute tripartite agreements with the SPD (OPMC), MoESD and GA(s). After signing the agreement, GAs will release the funds to the Department of Treasury and Accounts (DTA), Ministry of Finance with intimation to the SPD. Following this the DTA will then disburse the funds to the Administration and Finance Division of MoESD. The MoESD will manage the funds under the RGoB financial rules and procedures and submit quarterly progress reports (both programme & financial)

to GAs through SPD. Further, GAs will also receive monthly financial reports from the MoESD due to monthly cash planning and disbursement procedures of the GAs. On receiving the programme and financial reports GAs will review and provide necessary feedback. The next fund release from the GAs will depend on the programme and financial progress against the funds released. GAs will also carry out periodical financial monitoring/reviews of the MoESD so far as the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes are concerned.

On the auditing requirement of the GAs, the MoESD will be audited each financial year (July-June) by the Royal Audit Authority (RAA) of the RGoB on the sub-grant received and the audit reports will be shared with the GAs. GAs' internal/external auditors and donor audit will have access to the partner agency's books of accounts.

5.6. The Coordinating Agency (CA)

UNICEF is the Coordinating Agency (CA) for the GPE STG, SCG, and MG Programmes. There will be need for close working cooperation between the CA, GPE STG, SCG, and MG PCU of MoESD and the GAs. The CA will work closely with the GAs and ensure that the ESCM/LEG is updated annually about progress of the grant implementation.

5.7. Education Sector Coordination Meeting (ESCM)/ Local Education Group (LEG)

The Education Sector Coordination Meeting (ESCM), which is also considered as the Local Education Group (LEG), is chaired by the Secretary of the MoESD and co-chaired by the Representative of the UNICEF. The purpose of this meeting is to strengthen coordination, collaboration, and partnerships among the MoESD, relevant government agencies, development partners, and civil society organizations towards provision of equitable quality education and skills in the country. The membership of the ESCM/LEG is open to all stakeholders of education (multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, CSOs, other relevant government ministries/agencies). The ESCM/LEG is conducted on a biannual basis or as necessary. The Policy and Planning Division of the MoESD serves as the Secretariat to the ESCM/LEG. Technical and capacity development support to the MoESD to ensure its effective coordination will be provided by CA and GAs.

The main role of the ESCM/LEG in this GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes will be to build close relationships between members and ensure synergies and coherence between the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes and other activities. This will ensure the alignment of the GPE STG/SCG/MG and WB PforR programmes not only to the government priorities articulated in BEBP 2014-2024 and the 13th FYP, but also to the various partners' interventions in the education sector. This shall improve efficiency and effectiveness of education provision in Bhutan as a whole. This shall be achieved through information sharing and documentation of the on-going and incoming educational interventions in Bhutan.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) will be carried out as per the M&E Framework during the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy period, involving the programme staff, the monitoring officers from the Education Monitoring Division (EMD) of the MoESD and key stakeholders. M&E will be used to measure the indicators of achievements as per the Results Framework (Annexure B) and the GPE/STG Programme M&E Framework (Annexure C). Both qualitative and quantitative milestones achieved will be established through the M&E process. The education authorities from the MoESD, the DEOs at district levels, principals/ teachers of parent schools and parents will be involved in the M&E process. The M&E of the GPE/STG Programme are fully aligned and integrated into the existing national education sector monitoring of the 13th FYP and BEBP 2014-2024 to monitor the outcomes.

The implementation and monitoring of the ECCD centres has been institutionalized and decentralized to the Dzongkhags/*Thromdes*. The DEOs/TEOs are responsible for overall monitoring of the schools and education programmes, including ECCD centres. All the DEOs, school principals and a lower primary level school teacher of parent schools are trained in ECCD Centre monitoring for quality using a national tool called Quality Monitoring Tool for ECCD Centres (QMTEC). The parent schools monitor the ECCD centres every quarter on the process and outputs, provide immediate support to the ECCD facilitators, and send monitoring reports to the DEOs/TEOs who in turn compile the reports for their respective Dzongkhags/*Thromdes* and then send them to the ECCD and SEN Division. The Division integrates monitoring data/reports from all the dzongkhags, analyze, produce annual reports and disseminate to relevant stakeholders. The DEOs/TEOs combine ECCD centre monitoring with their regular school monitoring visit twice a year. During the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy period the ECCD and SEN Division will monitor 100 percent of the ECCD centres to monitor the status and quality of ECCD centre establishments, discuss with the DEOs/TEOs about the status of programme activities and way forward to improve as necessary. After the centres are operational, the monitoring of the centre programme will be the responsibility of the Dzongkhag /*Thromde* education offices as per practice.

The PPD and GAs will also periodically monitor the status and progress of the activities within the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy.

The challenges normally faced in the past are: delay in receiving monitoring data and the reports, and sometimes poor quality and incomplete data due to low capacity of data providers. During the DEOs/TEOs orientation a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat Analysis) analysis will be done to prevent and address the challenges. There are several existing Government mechanisms for filing complaints in place and the communities will be made aware of these during the consultation process for the establishment of ECCD centres which is an existing practice. The use of technology, constant follow up and the orientation of DEOs/TEOs on the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy will improve the time lag and quality of the reports.

The M&E process will be built on the existing GAs' and MoESD M&E systems, which will include:

- 1) The Results Framework (Annexure B) and the M&E Framework (Annexure C) included in this proposal will be used by the MoESD and GAs to track progress against the indicators and targets. The existing monitoring tools, such as the QMTEC and ECCD Classroom Environment Monitoring Tool, will be used during the monitoring process.
- 2) The programme staff, monitoring officers from EMD, the DEOs/TEOs from the dzongkhags/*thromdes* and parent schools will be responsible for monitoring the activities at the field level as per the M&E framework using the tools. At the parent school level a national monitoring tool called QMTEC will be used and DEO/TEOs will use the same tool for the purpose of verification to ensure data quality. The ECCD & SEN Division/EMOs will use the Classroom Environment Monitoring Tool. These tools are already being used to monitor quality of ECCD centre programme and include practice of the ECCD centre facilitators as well. The monitoring reports from the dzongkhags/*thromdes* will be submitted to the MoESD focal persons on a quarterly basis who in turn will review and further submit to GAs using the existing GAs quarterly progress reporting (QPR) format and following the existing channel of communication. The QPR will be used for monitoring the status of process level and output level indicators.
- 3) Joint field monitoring will be carried out by the GAs and the MoESD (PPD) focal persons to monitor and verify the progress of activities at the implementation. They will monitor 10-20% of the ECCD centres at least once a year covering all levels – district, urban/rural/remote, some of which may be done virtually. This will also result in reports and will be a basis for feedback to the programme team, and as reference for discussion during the review meetings.
- 4) SCI has established a system of monitoring interventions for quality using Quality Benchmarks for the major interventions such as trainings/workshops, rehabilitation of facilities, constructions of new facilities, etc. The Quality Benchmarks will be applied to the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy Programme components. However, these will need to be discussed, adapted and agreed to by GAs and MoESD so that everyone is aware of these standards and start working towards them which will happen towards the beginning of the grant. The quality benchmarks are used by SCI for monitoring interventions so that interventions meet the expected quality. Following the intervention monitoring, a report with follow up action points, if any, will be produced using an existing template. This report will be shared with the MoESD through the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy Programme focal person who will further share with the relevant stakeholders. The MoESD focal person and GAs will follow up on the action points till the closure of Programme.
- 5) Mid-Year and Annual Review Meetings convened and chaired by the Secretary respectively or his/her representative will be held, bringing together the key stakeholders. The purpose of the meetings will be to discuss progress in the project activity implementation against the targets, identify challenges, and collectively find

solutions to address them as necessary, take decisions for realignment, if any, so that the activities could be implemented within the timeframe of the action. This will also include the status of expenditure against each activity. All the meetings will be documented and the progress shared with the LEG/ESCM members on a half-yearly basis for their appraisal, input, and advice.

- 6) Mid-Term Review of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy will be conducted midway through the term of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy to assess the implementation status and progress towards the achievement of objectives and outcome level indicators as included in the Results Framework. This will be coordinated by the MoESD Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy focal person and done in-house led by programme staff, involving the participation of key stakeholders. The process and outcome of mid-term review will be documented and the findings used to review the implementation process and realigned as necessary. It may also be shared with GPE Secretariat and the LEG/ESCM members for appraisal, input, and advice.
- 7) At end of the Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy period an end of programme review/evaluation will be carried out involving the key stakeholders including beneficiaries which may be conducted in-house or may be led by a consultant. Achievement of the expected results vis-à-vis the indicators of achievement as reflected in the Results Framework, challenges and constraints, and lessons learnt will be documented and recommendations made for the way forward for further GPE support in education sector development and implementation of the sector plan.

7. Budget and Work Plan

The total budget requested for the GPE/STG Programme is USD 5.0 million. The breakdown of the budget by components and by financial years is provided in Table 13 below. The detailed budget breakdown is provided in Annexure D. A separate breakdown for the GA is provided in Annexure E.

Table 13: GPE/STG Budget Breakdown by Components

Component 1: Enhance access and equity to ECCD services for 3-5-year-old children.					
Item	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-2028)	Total
Total Component 1	1,393,200	1,306,800	786,000	-	3,486,000
Component 2: Enhance quality of ECCD Programme					
Item	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-2028)	Total
Total Component 2	222,000	617,000	325,000	-	1,164,000
Programme Management (PM)					
3.1. Administrative Cost (SC Bhutan)	61,721	67,577	71,240	74,462	275,000
3.2. Programme Management (MoESD)	6,750	7,750	6,750	3,750	25,000
3.3. Monitoring & Evaluation (MoESD)	2,000	5,000	34,000 ⁵⁴	9,000 ⁵⁵	50,000
Total Programme Management	70,471	80,327	111,990	87,212	350,000
TOTAL (Comp1 + Comp2 + PM-M&E)	1,685,671	2,004,127	1,222,990	87,212	5,000,000

The GPE/STG Programme will be implemented over 4 years, i.e., from March 2024 to February 2028, i.e., from 2023-24 to 2027-28 RGoB financial years. The detailed monthly workplan is provided in Annexure F.

⁵⁴ US\$ 30,000 is earmarked for administering nationwide QMTEC.

⁵⁵ Earmarked for GPE/STG Programme evaluation.

Annexures

Annexure A: Partnership Compact

Annexure A: Partnership Compact is attached to this Partnership Compact Implementation Strategy document in PDF Format – titled *Annexure A: Partnership Compact – Transforming early Learning Education in Bhutan*.

Annexure B: Results Framework

Note: Except Outcome Indicators, which are based on overall anticipated achievement, Output Indicators are specifically based on GPE STG Programme interventions. While national baselines are used, year wise are calculated based on GPE/STG Programme interventions. The overall national results may be different.

COMPONENT 1: Enhance access and equity to ECCD services for 3-5-year-old children.						
OUTCOME(S): Enhanced equitable access to quality ECCD services for 3-5-year-old children.						
INDICATORS(S): ⁵⁶	Baseline (2023)	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-28)	Year 5 (2028-29)
Net Enrollment Rate (NER) for ECCD disaggregated by gender, disabilities, and districts (urban/rural/remote.)	37.66% (37.95 F, 37.38 M)	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%
Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) for ECCD disaggregated by gender, disabilities, and districts (urban/rural/remote.)	54.47%	60	70	80	90	100%
Number of children enrolled in ECCD programme disaggregated by gender, disabilities, and districts (urban/rural/remote.)	13,012 (6,378F, 6,634M)	15,000	18,000	22,000	27,000	30,000
OUTPUTS: By the end of the GPE/STG Programme period, at least 80 standard and 5 medium ECCD centres and 20 Home-based interventions shall be established across the country. ⁵⁷						
INDICATOR(S) ⁵⁸	Baseline (2023)	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-28)	Year 5 (2028-29)
a) Number of Government supported standard ECCD centres across the country (Cumulative).	460 ⁵⁹	487	514	540		
b) Number of Government supported medium ECCD centres across the country (Cumulative)	0	2	5	5		
c) Number of Home-based ECCD interventions across the country. (Cumulative)	11	20	26	31		
d) Number of children enrolled in ECCD programme supported by STG disaggregated by gender, disabilities, and districts, (urban/rural/remote).	13,012 (6,378F, 6,634M)	13,579 ⁶⁰	14,167 ⁶¹	14,597 ⁶²		
COMPONENT 2: Enhance quality of ECCD Programme						
OUTCOME(S): Enhanced capacity of ECCD center facilitators to deliver quality ECCD programme.						
INDICATORS(S): ⁶³	Baseline (2023)	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-28)	Year 5 (2028-29)
Percentage of ECCD Centres meeting quality standard as defined in QMTEC	No baseline	-	-	90	-	-

⁵⁶ Based on GPE contribution

⁵⁷ Baseline + STG intervention.

⁵⁸ Baseline + STG contribution

⁵⁹ Number of ECCD centres as on 7/11/2023; 442 as per AES 2023.

⁶⁰ Calculated @15 per centre for 27 centres + 9 HBI @ 8 per HBI + 2 medium centres @ 30 per centre.

⁶¹ Calculated @15 per centre for 27 centres + 6 HBI @ 8 per BHI + 3 medium centres @ 30 per centre.

⁶² Calculated @15 per centre for 26 centres + 5 HBI @ 8 per HBI

⁶³ Based on GPE contribution.

OUTPUTS: By the end of the GPE/STG Programme period, there shall be in place at least 90 ECCD teachers with PGDE; 100 ECCD facilitators enrolled in the 3-year mixed mode Diploma in early learning; 60 ECCD Diploma holders enrolled in the B.Ed bridging programme in early learning; and ECCD center quality standards benchmarked with international standards.						
INDICATORS(S):⁶⁴	Baseline (2023)	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-28)	Year 5 (2028-29)
a) Number of ECCD facilitators trained on ECCD programme and parenting education in the Government supported ECCD centres (cumulative)	592 (563F, 29M)	645	695	745	-	-
b) Number of ECCD Facilitators enrolled in the 3-year mixed mode Diploma in early learning (cumulative)	221 (208F, 13M)	221	271	321	-	-
c) Number of ECCD Teachers with Post Graduate Diploma in ECCD (cumulative)	0	0	30	60	90	-
d) Number of ECCD facilitators enrolled in Bridging Degree course to upgrade to ECCD Teachers.	0	0	30	60	-	-
e) ECCD center quality standards benchmarked with the international standards of developed country.	NA	1	-	-	-	-
f) ELDS, curriculum, quality standards and facilitator competency standards revised based on international benchmarking.	NA	-	1	-	-	-
g) Number of ECCD facilitators oriented on the revised curriculum framework and standards.	NA	-	300	-	-	-
h) Number Parent school principals oriented on the revised centre quality standards.	NA	-	300	-	-	-
i) Number of ECCD Centers equipped with a set of a Smart TV, computers, and printers.	24	54	114	144	-	-

⁶⁴ Baseline + GPE/STG contribution.

Annexure C: STG Programme M&E Framework

COMPONENT 1: Enhance access and equity to ECCD services for 3-5-year-old children.				
Outcome(s): Enhanced access to quality ECCD services for 3–5-year-old children including for those with disabilities.				
Indicator(s):	Data Source	Means of verification	Frequency	Responsible for data collection
NER for ECCD disaggregated by gender, disabilities, and districts, (urban/rural/remote.)	EMIS	Annual Education Statistics (AES), ECCD Report	Annual	PPD & ECCD&SEN, MoESD
Outputs: By the end of the GPE/STG Programme period, at least 80 standard and 5 medium ECCD centres and 20 Home-based interventions shall be established across the country.				
Indicator(s):	Data Source	Means of verification	Frequency	Responsible for data collection
1. Number of new Government supported ECCD centres established.	EMIS	AES, ECCD Report	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
2. Number of Home-based ECCD interventions across the country. (Cumulative)	EMIS	AES, ECCD Report	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
3. Number of children enrolled in ECCD programme by gender, districts, urban/rural/remote.	EMIS	AES, ECCD Report	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
4. Number of parents completing one cycle of parenting education programme.	ECCD Report	Monitoring visit, attendance record	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
COMPONENT 2: Enhance quality of ECCD Programme				
Outcome(s): Enhanced capacity of ECCD center facilitators to deliver quality ECCD programme.				
Indicator(s):	Data Source	Means of verification	Frequency	Responsible for data collection
Percentage of ECCD Centers meeting quality standard as defined in QMTEC.	ECCD Report	Monitoring visits, surveys	Once in the Project period	ECCD&SEN, MoESD
Outputs: By the end of the GPE/STG Programme period, there shall be in place at least 90 ECCD teachers with PGDE; 100 ECCD facilitators enrolled in the 3-year mixed mode Diploma in early learning; 60 ECCD Diploma holders enrolled in the B.Ed bridging programme in early learning; and ECCD center quality standards benchmarked with international standards.				
Indicator(s):	Data Source	Means of verification	Frequency	Responsible for data collection
1. Number of ECCD facilitators trained on ECCD programme and parenting education (cumulative)	Training Report	Monitoring report of training programme, attendance records	Quarterly	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
2. Number of ECCD Facilitators enrolled in the 3-year mixed mode	Training Report	Training records, Availability of the document	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD

Diploma in early learning (cumulative)				
3. Number of ECCD Teachers with Post Graduate Diploma in ECCD (cumulative)	Report from PCOE	Monitoring of programme	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
4. Number of ECCD facilitators enrolled in Bridging Degree course to upgrade to ECCD Teachers	Enrollment Report	Enrollment Report	Annual	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
5. ECCD center quality standards benchmarked with international standards	Revised ECCD standards	Activity Report	Quarterly	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD
6. Number of ECCD Centers equipped with a set of a Smart TV, computers, and printers.	ECCD Report	Procurement records, Monitoring visits	Quarterly	ECCD & SEN DIV., MOESD

Annexure D: Detailed Budget

Note: The detailed budget provided in the table here below pertains to the GPE/STG Programme only. Further details are provided in *GPE Budget Template for STG* in attached Excel file.

Component 1: Enhance access and equity to ECCD services for 3-5-year-old children.							
Item	Unit Cost (USD)	Quantity	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-28)	Total
1.1. Establishment of 80 standard ECCD centres	37,800	80	1,134,000	1,134,000	756,000	-	3,024,000
1.2. Establishment of 5 medium ECCD centres	68,400	5	205,200	136,800	-	-	342,000
1.3. Establishment of 20 Home-based ECCD interventions	6,000	20	54,000	36,000	30,000	-	120,000
Total Component 1	-	-	1,393,200	1,306,800	786,000	-	3,486,000
Component 2: Enhance quality of ECCD Programme							
Item	Unit Cost (USD)	Quantity	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-2028)	Total
2.1. Basic training and parenting education for 150 new ECCD facilitators and 12 resource persons.	400	150	20,000	20,000	20,000	-	60,000
2.2. Enrolment of 100 ECCD facilitators in ECCD Diploma course.	2,500	100	-	125,000	125,000	-	250,000
2.3. Enrolment of 90 university graduates into ECCD Postgraduate Diploma (PGDE) programme.	3,000	90	90,000	90,000	90,000	-	270,000
2.4. Enrolment of 60 ECCD Diploma holder facilitators in Bridging degree programme.	3,000	60	-	90,000	90,000	-	180,000
2.5. Benchmarking ECCD centre quality standards with international standards.	40,000	1 team	40,000	-	-	-	40,000

2.6. ELDS, curriculum, quality standards and facilitator competency standards revised based on international benchmarking.	40,000	Complete review & revision	-	40,000	-	-	40,000
2.7. 300 ECCD facilitators oriented on the revised curriculum framework and standards	90,000	300 facilitators	-	90,000	-	-	90,000
2.8. 300 Parent school principals oriented on the revised centre quality standards	90,000	300 parent school principals	-	90,000	-	-	90,000
2.9. 120 ECCD centres supplied with a set of Smart TV, computers, and printers.	1,200	120 ECCD centres	72,000	72,000	-	-	144,000
Total Component 2	-	-	222,000	617,000	325,000	-	1,164,000
Programme Management and M&E (PM-M&E)							
Item	Unit Cost (USD)	Quantity	Year 1 (2024-25)	Year 2 (2025-26)	Year 3 (2026-27)	Year 4 (2027-2028)	Total
4.1 Administrative Cost (SC Bhutan)	-	-	61,721	67,577	71,240	74,462	275,000
3.2 (a) Programme Management (MoESD)	-	-	5,000	6,000	5,000	2,000	18,000
(b) LEG and review meetings ⁶⁵ (MoESD)	-	-	1,750	1,750	1,750	1,750	7,000
3.3 Monitoring & Evaluation (MoESD)	-	-	2,000	5,000	34,000 ⁶⁶	9,000 ⁶⁷	50,000
Total PM-M&E	-	-	70,471	80,327	111,990	87,212	350,000
TOTAL (Comp1 + Comp2 + PM-M&E)	-	-	1,685,671	2,004,127	1,222,990	87,212	5,000,000

⁶⁵ This shall be implemented by GA(SCI) Bhutan CO.

⁶⁶ US\$ 30,000 earmarked for administration of QMTEC.

⁶⁷ Earmarked for end of GPE/STG Programme evaluation.

Annexure E: Detailed Budget for GA Cost

Detailed Budget for GA Cost is provided in the *GPE Budget Template for STG* in attached Excel file.

Annexure F: Detailed Work Plan

Annexure F: Detailed Work Plan is attached in Excel Format – titled *Annexure F: Work Plan GPE-STG 2024-2028*.