

# CEO DECISION MEMO

DATE: 12/12/2024

<b>TO:</b> Laura Frigenti, CEO	
<b>FROM:</b> Marco Mantovanelli	
<b>SUBJECT:</b> Approval of a system transformation grant for Tonga	
Country	Tonga
System transformation grant allocation	US\$ 2,200,000 (originally 2,500,000 of which 300,000 was utilized as accelerated funding in 2022)
Allocation requested (XX%)	US\$ 2,200,000
Allocation recommended by Secretariat	US\$ 2,200,000
Results based financing	No
Grant agent	Save the Children Australia
Agency fee (% and amount)	US\$ 154,000 (7%)
Period	4 years
Expected start date	January 1, 2025
Closing date	December 31, 2028
Funding source	GPE Funds
<p><b>Action request</b></p> <p>Approve an allocation from GPE trust funds for a system transformation grant, in support of the System Transformation Grant program, as described in the application submitted and summarized in Table above, subject to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Availability of funds.</li> <li>b) Board decision BOD/2012/11-04 on commitment of trust funds for grants in annual installments.</li> </ul> <p><b>Grant Summary</b></p> <p>Tonga is looking to “improve literacy in early childhood education (ECE) and primary schools and numeracy in secondary schools, with a focus on male students, boys and girls from poorer households and children with disabilities. (impact)”</p> <p>To tackle these two bottlenecks of learning and access, the STG program is looking to achieve the following four outcomes (a) Increase access to inclusive curriculum materials for teaching reading in Tongan, (b) Improve skills and content knowledge of teachers to teach reading and support all students, (c) Increase frequency of reading and home learning support, and (d) Improve attendance at school.</p>	

As such, the Program focuses on (Component #1) Classroom and libraries, (Component#2) home reading program, (Component #3) Boy's education support, and (Component #4) Program management and learning.

The STG is fully aligned with the government plan including the MET Corporate Plan (medium-term education sector plan) priorities and with the Tonga Strategic Development Framework II 2015–2025 (overarching whole-of-government planning document). Moreover, The STG program selects key unfunded activities from the Partnership Compact that are most likely to have a system-wide transformative impact.

### **Current Portfolio**

Tonga has been a member of GPE since 2020. Over the years, Tonga has received different grants from GPE, including:

**Multiplier** → US\$ 5,000,000 (2024–2028) with WB as GA. Grant waiting effectiveness.

**Program development grant (Mult.)** → US\$ 200,000 (2023–2024). Grant completed.

**Program development grant (STG)** → US\$ 200,000 (2024–2025) Save the Children Australia. Active.

**Accelerated funding** (Volcano Recovery Program) → US\$ 300,000 (2022–2023) with Save the Children Australia as GA. Grant completed.

**COVID-19 AF** → US\$ 749,982 (2020–2021) with Save the Children UK and Save the Children Australia as GAs. Grant completed.

### **System Capacity Grant**

Tranche #1 → US\$ 700,000 (2022–2025) with Save the Children Australia as GA. Grant ongoing.

Tranche #2 → US\$ 40,000 (2023–2025) with Save the Children Australia as GA. Grant ongoing.

Tranche #3 → US\$ 260,000 (2024–2026) with Save the Children Australia as GA. Grant ongoing.

**Education Sector Program Implementation Grant** → Tonga's allocation (US\$2,500,000) for its Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG) is pooled into the regional ESPIG (US\$15 million) which is implementing the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) Program Phase 1 that supports 15 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) including Tonga, with the Asian Development Bank as GA.

### **Enabling Factors Assessment:**

In its partnership compact, the Government of Tonga affirmed that its priority reform would be to improve literacy in the early childhood education and primary level and numeracy at the secondary level. Specifically, there would be a focus on improving learning outcomes for boys, children from poorer families, as well as children with disabilities.

In its enabling factors analysis, Tonga identified data and evidence, gender responsive planning, and domestic financing as high priorities. The government had been deficient in its ability to gather timely data on learning and enrollment, thus hindering service delivery. In regard to literacy and numeracy and a plan for gender inclusion, national policies had been drawn up, however, a coherent approach to implementing them and coordinating them with existing and complementary reforms was lacking. Finally, for domestic financing, the enabling factors analysis flagged a bottleneck with volume of spending for foundational learning.

Tonga had already accessed its SCG allocation and started applying the funding toward updating policies on equity and inclusion; and implementation of the Multiplier program geared toward addressing quality learning and teaching will start shortly. The STG program has been designed to complement these grants and will implement those policies on inclusion, in addition to reforms around improved literacy, through precise and targeted interventions.

### **Significant Opportunities:**

The program targets two persistent challenges Tongans have been facing in recent years: poor reading scores and outcomes and the increasing number of boys at risk of dropping out of school.

The program complements existing projects focused on literacy at the different grade levels that are supported by other donors and will oversee the updating of reading and learning material to incorporate social themes like gender inclusivity, climate resilience, and anti-bullying. Teachers will be given adequate support to improve their pedagogical skills and receive training on the updated content of the learning materials. Another component is the home reading program, which will engage families and wider communities in being active agents in the improvement of their children's literacy.

Moreover, there is a great emphasis on addressing the large numbers of boys who have dropped out of school in recent years. There will be a program developed that incorporates targeted psycho-social support to at-risk boys and teachers and school staff will be trained and equipped in prevention of drop-out as well as facilitating remediation and integration back to school.

### **Significant Issues and Risks:**

Operationally, the program document states that there may be issues experienced with the capacity of government staff that may pose risk to the program implementation, among them include difficulty recruiting relevant personnel, dealing with high turnover, and maintaining adequate training for staff. To counter this risk, the government plans on availing competitive remuneration packages as well as professional training opportunities. There will also be regular review meetings to assess capacity gaps.

The program document acknowledges Tonga's vulnerability as a small island country given its geography and history of natural disasters, which puts the program at risk of disruptions and possible setbacks out of human control. In case of disaster, the government will employ its emergency preparedness and contingency plans to help ensure continuity of the program.

**Recommendation**

The Review Meeting (RM) concluded, based on the Secretariat's quality assurance review, that the **RM recommends to the CEO the approval of an allocation of US\$ 2,200,000 for Tonga with Save the Children Australia as Grant Agent.**

**RECOMMENDED DECISION**

**Grant: System transformation grant**

**Country: Tonga**

**CEO/2024/12-12-2024**

The CEO in her delegated authority from the Board of Directors approves the System Transformation Grant request for Tonga in the amount of US\$ 2,200,000 plus an additional US\$ 154,000.00 in agency fees to Save the Children Australia as the grant agent, as described in the application submitted and summarized in Table above, subject to:

- a) Availability of funds.
- b) Board decision BOD/2012/11-04 on commitment of trust funds for grants in annual installments.

Date: December 12, 2024



Laura Frigenti, CEO

**The CEO Decision Memo should not exceed 3 pages.**