

System Transformation Grant Annual Progress Report Template for Projects

Status: Accepted

Country Mongolia	Name of project this grant is contributing to Mongolia - MLT (May 10, 2022)	Grant ID GPE0000647	Project ID (if applicable) 03603399	
Grant Agent Save the Children Australia	Grant Type MLT	Approval Date 05/10/2022	Grant Effectiveness / Start Date 08/23/2022	
Expected Closing Date 08/23/2025	Grant Amount 5,000,000 (USD)	Timeframe Examined in this report		Date of Report Submission 04/01/2025
		From Date 12/31/2023	To Date 12/30/2024	

Implementation Progress

Overall Project Progress this Reporting Period

Overall Progress this Reporting Period ¹

Satisfactory (S)

Previous Rating

Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

Detailed Description including factors that lead to an upgrade/downgrade in the rating

(i) Major accomplishment:

Overall project progress for 2024 was rated as "Satisfactory" because the project achieved most of its major outputs efficiently with moderate shortcomings or delays. The Project Steering Committee(PSC) meeting on January 10, 2025, concluded that the overall rate of project implementation in 2024 was 87.4%, which was deemed satisfactory. (Please see Annex 1 for a table outlining the percentage of implementation progress for the 2024 action plan.) The project's action plan for 2024 includes 24 planned activities, divided into three primary components, with project management successfully carried out. Almost all activities planned for 2024 have been successfully implemented, except for the supply of kitchen procurement and the activity focused on raising awareness among teachers, parents, and students about the importance of school feeding through campaigns.

The project was rated as "off track" for financial absorption rate and the disbursement rate appears to be lower. As of December 31, 2024, the cumulative expenditure totaled \$2,317,103 (46% of the net grant amount), with a disbursement rate of \$1,702,684, or 48% of the approved \$3,564,857 budget for 2024. The primary reason for the low expenditure was a delayed procurement for supplying kitchen equipment to the 45 targeted schools. However, by the end of 2024, 2 out of 3 lots of the tender had been awarded to winners, with a total value of \$764,107 USD, which is not included in the cumulative expenditure. Official contract award notices were issued to the winners by the ME.

The performance of the procurement was done moderately. The project's procurement plan for 2024 includes three bids. Two of the planned procurements were successfully organized and completed. The project provided 150 teachers in 50 schools laptops and purchased e-classrooms for 38 target schools. However, one procurement for kitchen equipment, comprising three lots, had mixed results. Two lots were successfully organized, and notices of authorization to enter into contracts were issued to the winning bidders, covering 28 schools in Ulaanbaatar and 5 aimags, with a total of 764,107 USD. The remaining lot, valued at 460,291 USD and intended for 17 schools in 6 aimags, will be re-announced by March 30, 2025, once the Bid Evaluation Committee reaches a decision. .

Status on the achievement against target values. In 2024, the EQUAL project nearly achieved all of its targets under the Inclusive Education component. The project supported 2,294 secondary mainstream teachers, including 207 males (9.02%) and 2087 females (90.98%), in public schools across two districts in Ulaanbaatar and four rural aimags. These teachers received training focused on inclusive education approaches and methodologies, including differentiated learning, classroom management, and the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Additionally, as part of an activity to pilot special education teachers to Student Development and Support Classrooms (SDSCs) in target schools, 315 general education teachers received advice and guidance, including 48 males (15.2%) and 267 females (84.8%).

Student Development and Support Classrooms, established in 2023 across 18 target schools, benefited 155 students with disabilities, of which 100 males (64.5%) and 55 females (35.5%), through various activities. Training to strengthen parents' participation in the development, implementation, and monitoring of IEPs was conducted in 18 target schools, with 224 parents participating, including including 23 males (10.2%) and 201 females (89.8%).

Furthermore, 36 awareness campaigns aimed at helping peers support students with disabilities were organized in the 18 target schools, involving 6,117 peer students of which 2989 males (48.8%) and 3128 females (51.2%).

The next, the School Feeding component was launched as a pilot program in 45 schools across Mongolia, including 30 schools in rural areas⁴. The selection process for bidders in the tender for the procurement of supplies for 28 schools in Ulaanbaatar and 5 rural aimags has been successfully completed. Currently, the process is in the mandatory waiting period, as stipulated by Mongolian procurement law, allowing other bidders the opportunity to file complaints if necessary.

As part of the program, 36 students in total received scholarships to study as nutritionists. Of these, as of December 2024, 28 students have graduated.

An extracurricular, child-centered school health and nutrition program for rural and remote boarding school students has been developed and is currently being piloted in 30 out of 32 schools, benefiting 3,206 students of which 1481 males (46.2%) and 1725 females (53.8%).residing in these boarding houses. Since only 30 rural schools of the targeted 32 schools have boarding houses, the number of schools cannot be increased.

Additionally, school feeding guidelines for assessing the nutritional status of children with special dietary needs are in the final stage of development, to hopefully then be piloted into 2025.

Third, The Blended Learning component has expanded its reach by adding 35 target schools, bringing the total to 85 schools, including those in seven districts of Ulaanbaatar and five rural aimags. As part of this component, the ISO/IEC 2382-36 standard has been translated and included in the Mongolia Agency for Standard and Metrology's working list. Furthermore, two general requirements have been developed, one of which has successfully undergone multi-sector discussion.

As per the Ministry of Education's decision, 38 e-classrooms were equipped through the EQUAL project, while an additional 12 e-classrooms were funded by the ADB project, a development partner. This brings the total number of e-classrooms to 50.

A total of 164 IT specialists were trained, along with 1,320 teachers who gained basic pedagogy skills for utilizing blended learning to support teaching at the right level, differentiated learning through IEPs, continuous formative assessments, and more. Additionally, 150 teacher trainers were provided with laptops for teacher continuous professional development via e-learning platforms. Furthermore, 4,622 parents (disaggregated data not available) and guardians participated in online training, with the number of participants expected to increase in 2025.

The level of management performance was evaluated as "satisfactory" since grant performance management supported the grant in efficiently achieving practically all of its major outcomes with minor shortcomings. Grant performance management for the EQUAL project consists of several stakeholders such as ME, MOF, GA, Legal Education Group (LEG), PCS, and Multiplier and Development partners

such as JICA, KOICA, Save the Children, Asian Development Bank(ADB), World Bank (WB), and UNICEF. ME played an important role in the project's implementation and management. As the project's executing agency, ME is responsible for overseeing overall project implementation and management operations to ensure that they are completed smoothly and on schedule. The ME established a PIU office with four staff members to execute day-to-day project management and coordinate and implement project operations such as coordinator, finance officer, M&E officer, and administrative officer. At the highest level, the ME constituted an 11-member Project Steering Committee (PSC). The PSC is led by the ME's State Secretary and is made up of ME directors, members from the General Authority for Education(GAE), the coordinating agency, the Embassy of Japan, and Save the Children, the grant agent. During the reporting period, the PSC met two times and approved project action, financial, and procurement plans, oversaw project outcomes and annual progress for 2024, recommended actions to reflect new policy directions in national planning documents, and coordinated and resolved any inter-ministerial or cross-sectoral matters, and provided proper policy guidelines to overcome the problems of the project.

The ME conducted a LEG meeting on December 6, 2024, which included the ME, relevant government partners, donors, multipliers, development partners, and civil society groups. According to the project document, the project will be implemented over three years, beginning in June 2022 and concluding in June 2025. During the project implementation, it is expected that approximately \$607,371 in savings will be generated due to lower-than-planned costs for procurement, VAT, and some activities (subsequent NCE in 2025 has allowed for some realignment; which will be explained in the next reporting period).

Therefore, to effectively and completely use the funding, the LEG meeting discussed and supported the proposal of extending the project implementation duration by six months at no additional cost. In 2024, the GA carried out various tasks as part of its implementation and monitoring responsibilities for the program. It ensured that all activities were implemented in line with the endorsed annual plan and the approved program document. All performed activities were reviewed, and no objections were provided. The GA also adhered to the Policy on Education Sector Program Implementation Grants, following procedures related to approval and notification processes, implementation periods, reporting requirements, and revisions or amendments.

Additionally, the GA provided regular technical support to the ME and PIU to enhance government capacity. It supported the government in assessing the quality and effectiveness of program outcomes and outputs, ensuring the best programmatic solutions were pursued. The GA also worked proactively to diagnose and resolve any implementation issues that could adversely affect the program's desired outcomes or prevent it from reaching variable part targets.

Furthermore, the GA ensured the completeness and accuracy of all Financial Acquittal Reports, incorporating necessary controls as part of internal control procedures. It conducted monthly reviews of all transactions and their supporting documents, submitting them to the SCA. In Mongolia, SCJ also verified the adequacy of financial supporting documents during the submission of disbursement reports. Lastly, the GA carried out a spot check on the implementation and expenditure report of the monitoring and evaluation training arranged by the ME for Aimag Education Board specialists responsible for M&E. The results of this spot check were sent to the appropriate authorities for further action.

An external audit firm, selected by the National Audit Office of Mongolia, will conduct the yearly audit. The audit report is expected to be delivered to the GPE by the end of March 2025.

(ii) Implementation challenge/delays:

Delay in Procurement of School Kitchen Equipment and Materials: The procurement for kitchen equipment and auxiliary materials for the 45 target schools under the project was announced three times in 2024, divided into 3 Lots. Due to the absence of qualified bidders according to criteria of Bid Evaluation Committee that established by ME in the first two attempts, the tender was re-announced for the third time. As a result, two entities were selected to supply goods to a total of 28 schools in Ulaanbaatar and five aimags. The Ministry of Education has issued a contract award notice. Currently, the process is in the mandatory waiting period, as required by Mongolian procurement law, allowing other bidders the opportunity to file complaints if necessary.

Challenges in Development and Implementation of School Feeding Guidelines and Training Materials

These two activities: Developing and implementing school feeding guidelines for assessing nutritional status of children with special dietary needs, and Developing training materials were planned for 2024. However, the process faced delays due to a lack of expertise in this field in Mongolia. This initiative required the expertise and participation of specialists from multiple fields. By order of the Minister of Education, a working group was established, comprising teachers, scientists, and doctors from the Ministry of Education, the General Authority for Education, the National Institute for Educational Research, the Mongolian University of Science and Technology, the Mongolian National University of Medical Science, and special schools for children with disabilities. During its first meeting, the working group decided to study the practices of developed countries. A five-member team visited Japan's approach to special school meals, including their legal framework, menu

development for children with special needs, the integration of special needs students into mainstream schools, the distinction between children with and without special needs, and community-based initiatives for children with special needs.

Following this study, the working group was divided into three specialized teams: the management team, the nutrition team, and the speech and movement therapy team. Together, they developed the methodology for the guidelines. Discussions and training activities with relevant stakeholders are scheduled for the first half of January 2025. Piloting of the guidelines is planned for 45 schools, starting from the academic term on January 27, 2025.

Delays in Blended learning component:

The following activities planned for 2024 under the Blended Learning component have been delayed due to government agency procedures and implementation sequences: Creating benchmarks and standards for (i) digital infrastructure; (ii) administrative systems to support education technology; and (iii) human resources at the national, local, and school levels. The standard and benchmarks were developed by consulting firm in collaboration with ME and submitted to National statistical office for approval. But its approval process was delayed due to the National Statistical Office's procedure for approving the ISO standard. The standard typically takes 6-18 months to approve and is expected to be certified by June 2025.

Developing national, provincial, and district level plans to operationalize blended learning for primary and secondary schools has been delayed because the plans must be developed based on the results of piloting four blended learning modules in target schools. The piloting period will continue until the end of February 2025. In accordance with the project timeline, depending on the results of the pilot, it will take time to develop a plan for further implementation.

Additionally, draft implementation plans for schools, districts, aimags, and the national level have been developed but need to be finalized based on piloting results of four models.

See attached narrative for further details.

Project Implementation Progress, by Component / Objective

Component / Objective	Level of Progress this Reporting Period 2	Previous Rating
Inclusive education	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Satisfactory (S)

Brief description of the major activities undertaken and the relative level of success in fulfilling the project outputs and outcomes planned for this reporting period:

As stated in the project document "EQUAL will support the implementation of inclusive education policies and regulations in the target aimags and districts, including the operationalization of the government-mandated Student Development Support Classrooms, which will serve as a significant resource for teachers. Specifically, the institute of Teachers' Professional Development and local education departments/divisions will enhance the pedagogical skills and knowledge of all primary and lower-secondary mainstream teachers in the target areas by providing training on inclusive education approaches and methodologies, particularly differentiated learning, classroom management, IEPs and learning assessment for students with disabilities" 7 activities were scheduled for implementation in the scope of the Component 1.

Activity 1.1.1 – Train mainstream teachers on inclusive education particularly the use of IEPs and learning assessments for students with disabilities:

The project aims to equip mainstream teachers in Ulaanbaatar and rural general education schools with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement provisions from the General Education Law and the Law on Preschool and General Education. The goal is to enhance their understanding of inclusive education, develop individualized learning plans and programs, improve their knowledge of student diversity and learning styles, and enhance their ability to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of students with varying learning styles.

Training Locations:

Arkhangai Province: Erdenebulgan, Erdenemandal, Ulziit soums, with 103 participants

Selenge Province: Sukhbaatar, Bayangol, Tsagaan nuur soums, with 70 participants

Sukhbaatar Province: Baruun-Urt, Tümcencogt, Daryganga soums, with 62 participants

Ulaanbaatar City: 18 schools in Khan-Uul district, 12 schools in Sükhbaatar district, totaling 30 secondary schools, with 820 participants

Online Training: Khan-Uul and Sukhbaatar districts in Ulaanbaatar, Arkhangai, Sukhbaatar, Selenge, Uvs provinces, with 1600 participants

Local Training: The training program was designed with a balanced mix of theory and practical application over two days.

Day 1: Focused on the theory and methodology of inclusive education curricula, international trends, developmental characteristics of children with disabilities, working strategies, individual learning planning methodology, and adapting the Mongolian language and mathematics curricula.

Day 2: Covered the methodology for adapting the natural science curricula (geography, biology, physics), social science curricula (history, sociology), arts curricula (music, design technology), and physical education curricula.

The training was conducted in the "Art" hall of the target general education schools in local areas.

Ulaanbaatar Training: A total of 820 teachers participated in the "Curriculum Adjustment Methodology" training for middle school teachers in the general education schools of Sukhbaatar and Khan-Uul districts in Ulaanbaatar city. The training took place from May 13 to May 29, 2024, at the Teacher Development Center and Mongolian National University of Education.

Also, within the Activity 1.1.1, following activities were organized it includes a) The regulations for organizing individual training for students with disabilities in general education services were approved. This included meetings, discussions, and consultations to collaborate on implementing the Education Package Law and developing and approving policies and legal documents related to inclusive education. b) A study on international experiences in educational support services for children with disabilities, along with training on the "Methodology of Working with Children with Autism," was organized in Turkey. c) 17 teachers from general education schools in Arkhangai, Sukhbaatar, Selenge, Uvs aimags, Sukhbaatar, Khan-Uul, and Bayanzurkh districts participated in the "Basic Mongolian Sign Language Skills Training".

Activity 1.1.2 - Create networks for teachers around specific types of disabilities:

The Ministry of Education, the General Authority of Education, certain management teams of general education schools, and members of the project advisory service team discussed the draft operational map for the professional development group for teachers working with children with disabilities. This draft map was based on the activities of the Professional Development Team, which has been piloted in target schools since 2023.

Key activities: On November 15, 2024, a consultative discussion was held regarding the structure and operational map of the "Professional Development Group" for inclusive education teachers.

On November 19, 2024, the advisory team worked with special school training managers at General Education School No. 55 to develop a survey questionnaire for schools.

The first version of the questionnaire was developed, feedback was gathered from relevant organizations, and the final version was sent to participating schools by November 29.

Following section were included in the "Procedures for the Professional Development of Teachers and Staff of Kindergartens and General Education Schools" that will be approved by the Ministry of Education:

Section 2.8: Provincial and capital city education departments will establish professional groups for teachers, social workers, and psychologists in kindergartens, primary schools, and boarding schools, organizing training in child development and protection in cooperation with regional centers for teacher development.

Section 2.12: Teacher development centers in kindergartens and schools will provide support for professional groups of teachers and management staff working with children with disabilities. This will be managed by the state administrative body responsible for education. (Once the procedure is approved, it will be able to be provided)

Activity 1.1.3 - Pilot the deployment of special education teachers for Student Development Support Classrooms:

In 2024, 18 inclusive education teachers with expertise in mentoring and counseling were selected and contracted from general education schools No. 55, 29, 63, 25, 70, and 116 in Ulaanbaatar. Additionally, 10 teachers specializing in inclusive education were selected, and capacity-building training was organized January - April and September to November 2024, with conditions for further cooperation.

Key activities included:

The 18 inclusive education trainers worked in 17 target schools across 4 aimags and 2 districts. They met twice with local governments and 39 local leaders, advocating for the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Governor's action plan, achieving positive results.

They worked in Student development support classrooms, providing methodological support for classroom activities, re-establishing school support teams, and offering advice to teachers working with children

with disabilities.

Over the courses of 2024, the trainers worked in classrooms for a total of 15 days and conducted online sessions twice a week. They engaged with 78 administrators, 1,129 teachers, 3,635 peer students, and 825 parents and guardians.

They developed individual IEPs for 191 students with disabilities and provided professional support to 315 teachers. The trainers also helped practice teaching methods to assess student progress and worked with 287 parents and guardians of students with disabilities, offering individual advice and information.

Out of the students registered in the Ministry of Education's ESIS, 45 were students who did not require an IEPs.

Additionally, 86 children from non-targeted schools and kindergartens were assessed, and methodological recommendations and assistance were provided to parents, guardians, and teachers.

Activity 1.1.5 – Build capacity of parents on participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of IEPs, and Activity 1.1.6 – Increase awareness for all children to support their peers with disabilities were organized jointly with State Committee for Physical Culture and Sports.

From April 12 to May 10, 2024, a "Training and Advocacy Activity" was conducted for students in grades 6-9 to promote positive understanding and attitudes toward children with disabilities. Below are the key activities and outcomes:

Educational Outreach and Training

Local Outreach Activities: Conducted in 18 targeted schools across Uvs, Selenge, Arkhangai, and Sukhbaatar aimags, involving parents, guardians, and support team teachers.

Dates and locations included: April 12-17: Ulaangom soum secondary school No. 2, Barunuturuun, and Khovd soum secondary schools. April 15-18: Selenge aimag's Sukhbaatar, Bayangol, and Tsagaan Nuur soum schools. April 22-27: Arkhangai aimag's Erdenebulgan, Erdenemandal, and Ulziit soum schools. April 24-27: Baruun-Urt, Dariganga, and Tumentsogt soum secondary schools.

Participants: Total: 6,117 students (3,128 females, 2,989 males), 224 parents and guardians, and 224 children with disabilities. Training outreach specifically involved 2,079 middle school students (1,020 females, 1,059 males).

Specialized Parent Training: "Strengthening the Capacity of Parents in Developing, Implementing, and Monitoring Individual Education Plans" was held from April 15-26, 2024, in rural aimags and May 6-10, 2024, in Ulaanbaatar city.

Peer Support Initiatives: Meetings and free discussions were held among school students with prominent para-athletes to inspire and educate about disabilities.

Notable athletes included Para-archer, Para-judo, Wheelchair Table Tennis, and Para-bocce National Team members.

Bochi Promotion Event: A 1-day physical education event was held in all 18 targeted schools to encourage interest in bocce among students with disabilities.

Students showcased teamwork, talent development, and peer cooperation.

Resource Support: Bocce equipment sets and manuals were provided to school principals and physical education teachers to continue fostering peer friendship, cooperation, and inclusion through sports.

Outcome Highlights: Inclusive activities fostered a supportive atmosphere for children with disabilities.

Training and advocacy enhanced awareness among over 6,000 students, parents, and teachers.

Bocce events successfully introduced and popularized an inclusive sport in schools.

Component / Objective

Level of Progress this Reporting Period 2

Previous Rating

School Feeding

Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)

Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)

Brief description of the major activities undertaken and the relative level of success in fulfilling the project outputs and outcomes planned for this reporting period:

?For Component 2, six activities were planned to be implemented:

Activity 2.1.1 – Provide necessary equipment and auxiliary tools needed to support school feeding in targeted boarding schools in remote area and special schools:

The tender for supplying essential equipment and auxiliary tools to support school feeding programs in 45 targeted schools, divided into three sets, was announced three times in 2024. The first two rounds of the tender were unsuccessful because the bidders failed to meet the technical specifications outlined in the tender materials.

However, during the third announcement, issued on November 25, 2024, and opened on December 25, 2024, two out of the three sets successfully identified winning bidders. Contract award notifications were subsequently issued to the selected bidders for these two sets.

As for the remaining one set, it will be re-announced in 2025 in accordance with the decision made by the Bid Evaluation Committee (BEC). This ensures that the procurement process remains compliant with established guidelines and meets the program's requirements effectively.

Activity 2.1.2 – Build the capacity of school-based nutritionists, dieticians, and cooks through training on school feed production and services:

Throughout the duration of the project, a total of 36 students participated in conversion training to become qualified nutritionists. This program aimed to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to support improved school feeding programs in general education schools.

As of December 2024, 28 participants successfully completed the training and have commenced their roles at contracted general education schools. The remaining 8 students will complete their training and graduate in 2025.

Activity 2.1.3 – Increase awareness and capacity of teachers, parents, and students on the importance of school feeding through campaigns:

Preparations were initially made to organize activities focusing on the topic of "The Importance of Breakfast" for middle school students in target aimags and districts. This included drafting an order from the Minister of Education and preparing a detailed action plan.

However, based on a revised decision by the Ministry of Education, it was determined to shift the focus toward organizing a "School lunch" training and advocacy event primarily targeting parents of first-grade students. The objective of this event is to enhance parental involvement in school lunch activities and promote better understanding of nutritional needs.

The order from the Minister, the finalized action plan, a detailed cost breakdown, and a curriculum for the event were all approved. Implementation of this activity is scheduled to commence in the first quarter of 2025.

Activity 2.2.1 – Support rural and remote boarding school students with extracurricular child-centered school, health, and nutrition program:

By order of the Minister of Education No. A/153 dated April 3, 2024, a program was piloted in local boarding schools, with the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Educational Research organizing a teacher training course on August 28, 2024 for 45 teachers from targeted schools who are responsible for boarding schools and school lunch. The training combined theory and practice, covering key topics such as food analysis, hygiene, nutrients, proper consumption, and the concept of rainbow foods. It was conducted by experts from the Department of Nutrition at the School of Public Health, Health Science University of Mongolia, and the School of Industrial Technology, Mongolian University of Science and Technology.

The program is being piloted with students, 1073 elementary school children, 1306 middle school children, and 827 high school children totaling 3,206, in boarding schools across 24 general education schools in 11 aimags: Bayan-Ulgii, Bulgan, Dornogovi, Dornod, Sukhbaatar, Selenge, Tuv, Uvs, Khovd, Khuvsgul, and Khentii. To support this, a "Child-Centered Nutrition and Health Program for Students in Local and Remote Dormitories" has been developed along with manuals for both students and teachers.

The student manual is designed for self-learning and collaboration with teachers, while the teacher manual provides theoretical knowledge and practical guidance. A total of 200 handbooks for grades I–V, 250 for grades VI–IX, 150 for grades X–XII, and 100 copies of the program were printed and distributed to schools as part of the initiative.

Activity 2.2.2 – Develop and implement school feeding guidelines for assessing nutritional status of children with special dietary need and Activity 2.2.3 – Develop training materials for nutritionists and cooks on special nutritional needs, conduct trainings:

The working group for developing the guidelines was established by Minister of Education Order A/21, dated January 5, 2024, and consisted of 14 members. The group meeting held 4 times in 2024, with its first meeting held on March 13, 2024. During this meeting, plans were made to conduct experience study activities in Japan and to approve the guidelines for the guidelines development.

A team of five members visited Japan from April 14–21, 2024, to gather insights for the guidelines. The information collected during this trip included:

1. Details about Japan's legal system and its activity implementation processes.
2. The methodology for creating menus for children with special needs.
3. Techniques for developing suitable nutrition plans using anthropometry.
4. The process of providing lunch for children with special needs in mainstream schools.
5. Approaches to differentiating meals for children with special needs and others.

6. Community driven initiatives for supporting children with special needs.

The working group held following additional meetings:

- May 6, 2024 (2nd meeting): The group decided to review the first version of the guidelines on June 15, 2024.
- August 22, 2024 (3rd meeting): The group resolved to consolidate draft versions, eliminate overlaps, and incorporate feedback from the working group head.
- December 5, 2024: The team leaders and working group secretary met to finalize the manual draft, which was completed on December 30, 2024.

As of December 2024, the finalized 90 pages draft of the guidelines, the first of its kind in Mongolia, was ready. Discussions and training sessions for its implementation are scheduled for January 2025.

Component / Objective**Level of Progress this Reporting Period 2****Previous Rating**

Blended Learning

Satisfactory (S)

Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

Brief description of the major activities undertaken and the relative level of success in fulfilling the project outputs and outcomes planned for this reporting period:

As stated on the project document that “The component will contribute to the development of blended learning at the policy and planning level and pilot a blended learning model at schools in the targeted areas” following major accomplishments have been achieved in the scope of the Component 3:

Activity 3.1.1. Create benchmarks and standards for (i) digital infrastructure; (ii) administrative systems to support education technology; and (iii) human resources at the national, local, and school levels:

The rapid advancement of information technology in education has highlighted the need for a national terminology standard to address discrepancies and overlaps in terms and concepts, which are impacting implementation. To address this, a draft of the “ISO/IEC 2382-36 Information Technology Vocabulary – Part 36: Learning, Education, and Training” standard series has been prepared for national localization.

On December 15, 2024, feedback on the draft standard was received from relevant organizations. Efforts are ongoing with the MASM to review and approve the standard.

Additionally, a draft of the “Competency Framework for Blended Learning and Common Requirements for Teachers” has been developed, with a discussion held on December 24, 2024. Representatives from the ME, GAE, Capital City Department of Education, Mongolian State University of Education, Otgontenger University, and general education schools participated in the discussion.

Readiness Survey that conducted in 24 schools in Ulaanbaatar (February 2–9, 2024) and 27 general education schools in Bulgan, Dundgovi, Sukhbaatar, Uvs, and Khovd aimags between March 5–15, 2024 was conducted in developing the standard and requirements.

Activity 3.2.1. Improve school based digital infrastructure including connectivity and Activity 3.2.3. Supply digital devices to teachers and students in need:

Between August 26 and November 4, 2024, targeted 38 schools successfully equipped with the necessary tools to establish e-classrooms. These schools are now fully equipped to operate smart classrooms as part of the project.

The breakdown of schools with newly established e-classrooms includes:

- Chingeltei district: 9 schools
- Khan-Uul district: 3 schools
- Bulgan aimag: 6 schools
- Dundgovi aimag: 3 schools
- Sukhbaatar aimag: 5 schools
- Uvs aimag: 6 schools
- Khovd aimag: 6 schools

This activity involves collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a multiplier partner, equipping 12 schools and establishing a total of 50 smart classrooms in the mentioned districts and aimags.

Activity 3.2.4. Train IT staff in maintaining ICT infrastructure:

The MUST Open Education Center successfully organized two training sessions on March 21-22 and October 24-25, 2024. These sessions were designed to enhance the skills of teachers and IT staff from the participating schools.

A total of 164 educators and IT professionals from 84 target schools actively participated in the training. The primary objective of these sessions was to equip participants with the knowledge and tools necessary to assist teachers in implementing blended learning approaches effectively. This included guidance on IT infrastructure, troubleshooting, and the integration of technology into teaching practices,

ensuring a smooth and efficient learning experience for students.

Activity 3.2.5. Train teachers on basic pedagogy skills utilizing blended learning to support teaching at the right level, differentiated learning through IEPs, continuous formative assessment, etc:

The Open Education Center at MUST has undertaken a series of initiatives to train and support teachers in developing and implementing individualized learning plans using blended learning approaches, organizing specialized training programs tailored to diverse student needs, and emphasizing regular progress assessment to enhance learning outcomes.

On May 15-17 and October 21-22, 2024, a total of 228 teachers from 80 target schools participated in training sessions designed to equip them with the skills to master and implement the blended learning methodology effectively. These trained teachers later organized dissemination training sessions in their respective schools, reaching 1,170 additional teachers from the same 80 schools. The primary objective of these sessions was to provide primary and secondary school teachers from 80 target schools with the necessary tools to integrate blended learning models into their classrooms and foster individualized learning tailored to students' unique needs.

Between September 14 and October 4, 2024, 2 day dissemination training sessions were conducted across general education schools, covering 750 participants, including 10 from Chingeltei District and 14 from Khan-Uul District in Ulaanbaatar, as well as 6 each from Bulgan, Uvs, and Khovd Aimags, 5 from Sukhbaatar Aimag, and 3 from Dundgovi Aimag. Additionally, starting November 27, 2024, dissemination training session 2 commenced in targeted general education schools, involving 420 participants. These included 4 from Bayangol District, 13 from Bayanzurkh District, 6 from Songinokhairkhan District, 4 from Sukhbaatar District, and 1 from Nalaikh District in Ulaanbaatar.

Through these comprehensive training programs, the Open Education Center of MUST, serving as the consulting firm for Component 3, has empowered teachers to adopt and implement blended learning methodologies effectively while laying the foundation for individualized learning experiences.

Activity 3.2.6. Enhance teacher continuous professional development via e-learning platforms:

On May 15, 2024, a comprehensive training course for teachers specializing in blended learning was successfully conducted. During this event, 150 teachers representing 50 schools were provided with the latest high-performance laptops. This initiative aimed to equip educators with the necessary tools and technology to implement blended learning models effectively in their classrooms.

As a result of the training, these teachers have established active teacher professional development communities within their schools. These communities serve as collaborative platforms where teachers support one another in developing innovative teaching topics, refining instructional methods, and enhancing the overall learning experience for students. By fostering peer-to-peer collaboration and sharing best practices, these communities are contributing significantly to the improvement of teaching quality and the success of blended learning initiatives across the participating schools.

Activity 3.2.7. Support parents to engage with their children's remote learning

On December 7, 2024, the Open Education Center of MUST organized an online parent training session. A total of 1,422 parents participated directly in the training through TEAMS. Additionally, 3,200 parents viewed the lessons posted on the YouTube page.

As part of the EQUAL project, 255 teachers from 85 target schools are testing specific blended learning models in their classrooms. These teachers are also sharing their good practices with other educators.

To further support the project, efforts are being made to increase the participation of students who cannot join the blended learning experiments. Parents and guardians are receiving advice and training on how to better support their children during this process.

Component / Objective**Level of Progress this Reporting Period 2****Previous Rating**

Program Management

Satisfactory (S)

No Rating Available

Brief description of the major activities undertaken and the relative level of success in fulfilling the project outputs and outcomes planned for this reporting period:

The level of management performance was evaluated as "satisfactory" since grant performance management supported the grant in efficiently achieving practically all of its major outcomes with minor shortcomings. Grant performance management for the EQUAL project consists of several stakeholders such as ME, MOF, GA, Legal Education Group (LEG), PCS, and Multiplier and Development partners such as JICA, KOICA, Save the Children, Asian Development Bank(ADB), World Bank (WB), and UNICEF. ME played an important role in the project's implementation and management. As the project's executing agency, ME is responsible for overseeing overall project implementation and management operations to ensure that they are completed smoothly and on schedule. The ME established a PIU office with four staff members to execute day-to-day project management and coordinate and implement project operations such as coordinator, finance officer, M&E officer, and administrative officer.

At the highest level, the ME constituted an 11-member Project Steering Committee (PSC). The PSC is led by the ME's State Secretary and is made up of ME directors, members from the General Authority for Education(GAE), the coordinating agency, the Embassy of Japan, and Save the Children, the grant agent. During the reporting period, the PSC met two times and approved project action, financial, and procurement plans, oversaw project outcomes and annual progress for 2024, recommended actions to reflect new policy directions in national planning documents, and coordinated and resolved any inter-ministerial or cross-sectoral matters, and provided proper policy guidelines to overcome the problems of the project.

The ME conducted a LEG meeting on December 6, 2024, which included the ME, relevant government partners, donors, multipliers, development partners, and civil society groups. According to the project document, the project will be implemented over three years, beginning in June 2022 and concluding in June 2025. During the project implementation, it is expected that approximately \$607,371 in savings will be generated due to lower-than-planned costs for procurement, VAT, and some activities (subsequent NCE in 2025 has allowed for some realignment; which will be explained in the next reporting period).

Therefore, to effectively and completely use the funding, the LEG meeting discussed and supported the proposal of extending the project implementation duration by six months at no additional cost.

In 2024, the GA carried out various tasks as part of its implementation and monitoring responsibilities for the program. It ensured that all activities were implemented in line with the endorsed annual plan and the approved program document. All performed activities were reviewed, and no objections were provided. The GA also adhered to the Policy on Education Sector Program Implementation Grants, following procedures related to approval and notification processes, implementation periods, reporting requirements, and revisions or amendments.

Additionally, the GA provided regular technical support to the ME and PIU to enhance government capacity. It supported the government in assessing the quality and effectiveness of program outcomes and outputs, ensuring the best programmatic solutions were pursued. The GA also worked proactively to diagnose and resolve any implementation issues that could adversely affect the program's desired outcomes or prevent it from reaching variable part targets.

Furthermore, the GA ensured the completeness and accuracy of all Financial Acquittal Reports, incorporating necessary controls as part of internal control procedures. It conducted monthly reviews of all transactions and their supporting documents, submitting them to the SCA. In Mongolia, SCJ also verified the adequacy of financial supporting documents during the submission of disbursement reports.

Lastly, the GA carried out a spot check on the implementation and expenditure report of the monitoring and evaluation training arranged by the ME for Aimag Education Board specialists responsible for M&E. The results of this spot check were sent to the appropriate authorities for further action.

An external audit firm, selected by the National Audit Office of Mongolia, will conduct the yearly audit. The audit report is expected to be delivered to the GPE by the end of March 2025.

Project Management-Related Challenges and Delays: Efforts to mitigate project management challenges have seen some progress despite the obstacles:

Administrative Staffing: The appointment of a new Administrative Assistant within the Project Implementation Unit reduced the workload on other staff, enabling them to focus on their specific duties and timelines.

Key Personnel Turnover: Although there have been frequent changes in leadership, including three replacements of the Project Director and the absence of a director for six months, interim leadership by Oyunaa.P (Director of the Educational Integrated Policy and Planning Department) helped maintain continuity. Her efforts, along with the professional teams, achieved a 91.29% success rate in 2024 activity implementation.

Support from Funding Organizations: Regular engagement and supervision by funding organizations, such as spot checks and consultations by the Save the Children Japan, provided guidance to keep activities on track. These efforts also minimized the risks caused by leadership turnover and political changes during the Parliamentary election year.

While challenges remain, such as the lack of project management expertise among some Ministry of Education and GAE specialists, improvements in administrative coordination and funding organization support have helped stabilize certain aspects of the project and prevent further delays.

Lessons, innovative/promising practices

The project's implementation resulted in the development of the following successful practices and innovative interventions:

1. Emerging lessons:

Component 1: Inclusive Education

Consistent and targeted teacher training, especially in inclusive education and special needs methodologies, is essential for improving the quality of education for students with disabilities.

Involving parents and guardians early in the educational process, such as training on IEPs, enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education component.

Component 2: School Feeding

Addressing both nutrition and education together helps create a better approach to improving students' overall well-being and academic success.

Scholarships and capacity building activities for nutritionists and cooks have been effective in providing qualified staff to implement School feeding programs and Law on Food production and services in general educational schools.

Component 3: Blended Learning

Combining in-person training with e-learning training requires strong infrastructure support, including the establishment of e-classrooms and comprehensive training for IT specialists.

Getting parents and guardians involved is key to making sure blended learning works well, both in the classroom and at home

2. Successful practices:

Component 1: Inclusive Education

The design and readiness of teacher networks to offer ongoing support have been a successful model for ensuring sustainability beyond the project's duration.

Awareness campaigns helped raise understanding and awareness for children with disabilities, reaching 6,117 peers..

Component 2: School Feeding

The successful piloting of the school health and nutrition program, benefiting over 3,200 students, is a significant achievement in improving student nutrition in boarding schools.

The approval and upcoming implementation of school feeding awareness campaigns for parents and teachers highlight the importance of collaboration and planning across all stakeholders.

Component 3: Blended Learning

The collaboration with ADB to set up 50 e-classrooms was highly successful, significantly improving the learning environment and expanding the reach with the involvement of multiplier partners.

Teacher training on blended learning pedagogy was highly effective, as demonstrated by the training of 1,320 teachers, equipping them to implement differentiated learning and IEPs.

3. Innovative interventions.

Component 1: Inclusive Education

Incorporating Mongolian sign language into the training was an innovative approach to inclusivity, increasing accessibility for students with hearing disabilities.

Component 2: School Feeding

Developing specific school feeding guidelines for children with special dietary needs is an innovative intervention, ensuring that the nutritional needs of all children, including those with specific conditions, are properly addressed for the first time in Mongolia.

Component 3: Blended Learning

Developing 1 standard and 2 general requirements for Blended Learning is a new approach, ensuring a structured framework for integrating technology and pedagogy in classrooms and something that will help to inform the inclusion of technology in classrooms across Mongolia moving forward.

Impact stories

IMPACT STORY 2024

P.B, an 8th-grade student at Khovd Soum Secondary School in Uvs Aimag, was diagnosed with intellectual and speech disabilities. At school P.B felt excluded and discouraged, struggling to connect with his classmates, which led him to stop attending altogether.

After the EQUAL project started implementation, advocacy work was conducted to raise awareness among teachers and classmates on disability and inclusive education. Additionally, meetings and counseling sessions were held with the student and his family. With growing confidence and support, P.B returned to the classroom in the spring of 2024, actively engaging in lessons and connecting with his peers.

The Inclusive Education teachers, trained through the EQUAL Project, conducted an initial assessment of students with disabilities in order to better understand their specific needs and requirements for them to be able to safely and successfully return to the classroom. Teachers are provided with training and methodological guidance to support children's reintegration and retention.

At the SDSC, P.B. receives personalised support from his teachers, including his maths teacher (pictured), tailored to his learning needs.

Thanks to the EQUAL Project, P.B and his teachers and family will continue working together to strengthen his inclusive education, ensuring his ongoing learning and social development.

Name changed and consent for photos received.

Attached annex 6.

Tangible Outputs, Knowledge Products, Results Framework and other Supporting Documentation

#	File Name	Document Type	Description
1	Annex 1 Planning and implementation FINAL.docx	Results Framework	Planning and implementation per component - progress by end 2024
2	Annex 2 Project progress by components FINAL.docx	Results Framework	Project Implementation Progress, by Component/Objective, with further details
2	Annex 6 Impact story FINAL.docx	Knowledge Product	Impact story with pictures (consent received)
2	Annex 3 Updated Results Framework FINAL.xlsx	Results Framework	Results Framework
2	Annex 4 Global numbers reporting template FINAL.docx	Knowledge Product	Numbers reached per GPE indicators
2	Annex 5 Cumulative Beneficiary Children FINAL.docx	Results Framework	Number of children reached per activity/indicator
2	Annex 9 Multiplier involvement in the EQUAL project implementation FINAL.docx	Knowledge Product	Multiplier document per component

The documents listed were submitted with the progress report. If you'd like access to them, please contact the grant operations officer for your country.

Financial Reporting & Grant Management

Financial Reporting on GPE Grant

Cumulative Financial Absorption Rate

Approved Budget to Date	Cumulative Expenditure	Cumulative Financial Absorption Rate	Level of Financial Absorption
5,000,000	2,321,643.45	46.43	Off Track

Since the financial absorption is not rated as 'on track', please provide an explanation that identifies the main activities that have been delayed and their corresponding unspent amounts, as well as reasons for the delay and steps taken to ensure that expenditure absorption gets on track in the next reporting period.

Implementation challenge/delays:

Delay in Procurement of School Kitchen Equipment and Materials: The procurement for kitchen equipment and auxiliary materials for the 45 target schools under the project was announced three times in 2024,

divided into 3 Lots. Due to the absence of qualified bidders according to criteria of Bid Evaluation Committee that established by ME in the first two attempts, the tender was re-announced for the third time. As a result, two entities were selected to supply goods to a total of 28 schools in Ulaanbaatar and five aimags. The Ministry of Education has issued a contract award notice. Currently, the process is in the mandatory waiting period, as required by Mongolian procurement law, allowing other bidders the opportunity to file complaints if necessary.

Challenges in Development and Implementation of School Feeding Guidelines and Training Materials

These two activities: Developing and implementing school feeding guidelines for assessing nutritional status of children with special dietary needs, and Developing training materials were planned for 2024. However, the process faced delays due to a lack of expertise in this field in Mongolia. This initiative required the expertise and participation of specialists from multiple fields. By order of the Minister of Education, a working group was established, comprising teachers, scientists, and doctors from the Ministry of Education, the General Authority for Education, the National Institute for Educational Research, the Mongolian University of Science and Technology, the Mongolian National University of Medical Science, and special schools for children with disabilities.

During its first meeting, the working group decided to study the practices of developed countries. A five-member team visited Japan's approach to special school meals, including their legal framework, menu development for children with special needs, the integration of special needs students into mainstream schools, the distinction between children with and without special needs, and community-based initiatives for children with special needs.

Following this study, the working group was divided into three specialized teams: the management team, the nutrition team, and the speech and movement therapy team. Together, they developed the methodology for the guidelines. Discussions and training activities with relevant stakeholders are scheduled for the first half of January 2025. Piloting of the guidelines is planned for 45 schools, starting from the academic term on January 27, 2025.

Delays in Blended learning component:

The following activities planned for 2024 under the Blended Learning component have been delayed due to government agency procedures and implementation sequences:

Creating benchmarks and standards for (i) digital infrastructure; (ii) administrative systems to support education technology; and (iii) human resources at the national, local, and school levels. The standard and benchmarks were developed by consulting firm in collaboration with ME and submitted to National statistical office for approval. But its approval process was delayed due to the National Statistical Office's procedure for approving the ISO standard. The standard typically takes 6-18 months to approve and is expected to be certified by June 2025.

Developing national, provincial, and district level plans to operationalize blended learning for primary and secondary schools has been delayed because the plans must be developed based on the results of piloting four blended learning modules in target schools. The piloting period will continue until the end of February 2025. In accordance with the project timeline, depending on the results of the pilot, it will take time to develop a plan for further implementation.

Additionally, draft implementation plans for schools, districts, aimags, and the national level have been developed but need to be finalized based on piloting results of four models.

Missed Activity: Awareness Campaigns on School Feeding: The planned activity to increase awareness and capacity of teachers, parents, and students on the importance of school feeding through campaigns was not implemented. Preparations were initially made to organize activities focusing on the topic of "The Importance of Breakfast" for middle school students in target aimags and districts. This included drafting an order from the Minister of Education and preparing a detailed action plan. However, based on a revised decision by the Ministry of Education, it was determined to shift the focus toward organizing a "School lunch" training and advocacy event primarily targeting parents of first-grade students. The objective of this event is to enhance parental involvement in school lunch activities and promote better understanding of nutritional needs. The order from the Minister, the finalized action plan, a detailed cost breakdown, and a curriculum for the event were all approved. Implementation of this activity is scheduled

to commence in the first quarter of 2025.

Progress made in mitigating the challenges:

1. Challenges in the Procurement Process: The procurement for kitchen equipment worth about \$1,200,000, intended for 45 targeted schools in Ulaanbaatar and rural aimags, initially faced significant delays due to the lack of bidders meeting the tender requirements. To address this, the tender process was announced three times in 2024. By the third announcement, two lots of the tender successfully secured chosen bidders, allowing progress toward equipping the schools as planned.

2. Project Management-Related Challenges and Delays: Efforts to mitigate project management challenges have seen some progress despite the obstacles:

Administrative Staffing: The appointment of a new Administrative Assistant within the Project Implementation Unit reduced the workload on other staff, enabling them to focus on their specific duties and timelines.

Key Personnel Turnover: Although there have been frequent changes in leadership, including three replacements of the Project Director and the absence of a director for six months, interim leadership by Oyunaa.P (Director of the Educational Integrated Policy and Planning Department) helped maintain continuity. Her efforts, along with the professional teams, achieved a 91.29% success rate in 2024 activity implementation.

Support from Funding Organizations: Regular engagement and supervision by funding organizations, such as spot checks and consultations by the Save the Children Japan, provided guidance to keep activities on track. These efforts also minimized the risks caused by leadership turnover and political changes during the Parliamentary election year.

While challenges remain, such as the lack of project management expertise among some Ministry of Education and GAE specialists, improvements in administrative coordination and funding organization support have helped stabilize certain aspects of the project and prevent further delays.

(v) Previous reporting period's challenges and delays:

1. Delays in the Procurement Process: a) Progress in Procurement for Kitchen Equipment – Efforts have been made to address delays caused by the lack of ME officials with A3 certificates. The A3 certification which is an understanding of procurement procedures and law, is required by the Bid Evaluation Committee. PIU enhanced the technical requirements for kitchen equipment. A short-term expert was contracted to compare equipment and conduct market research in Mongolia, leading to a revision of the technical specifications, which were successfully utilized for the last tender announced in 2024.

2. Delays in the Implementation of Project Activities: Development of School Feeding Guidelines and Training Materials – After a study visit to Japan, the progress of the working group was activated, and the efforts and specialized knowledge of working group members from various sectors, such as universities, research institutions, teachers, and doctors, helped boost the progress. For children with special needs (disabilities), the process of addressing and resolving nutritional difficulties is relatively new, and there was a shortage of qualified personnel to carry it out. As of December 2024, the development of the guideline, which is being created for the first time in Mongolia, was at its concluding stage and is planned to be used for training in January 2025.

3. Project Management-Related Challenges and Delays: Turnover of Key Personnel – Leadership turnover in 2024 was managed effectively, with interim directors, such as Oyunaa.P, taking over responsibilities seamlessly. This continuity helped mitigate delays caused by frequent replacements.

Priority actions planned for the following reporting period

Priority actions planned for the following reporting period to overcome constraints, build on achievements and partnerships, and use the lessons learned during the reporting period:

Procurement Process Enhancement:

Finalize the procurement for the remaining kitchen equipment for 17 rural schools by re-announcing the tender and ensuring compliance with required specifications to avoid further delays.

Strengthening Partnerships and Coordination:

Maintain close collaboration with development partners, including JICA, KOICA, UNICEF, and the Japanese Embassy, to ensure effective coordination and support, particularly for the extension period.

Conduct periodic coordination meetings with all stakeholders, including the PSC, to review progress and address any emerging issues in the project's implementation.

Monitoring and Evaluation System Enhancement:

Continue the active monitoring of all project activities, ensuring that recommendations from M&E visits are promptly acted upon to improve project outcomes.

Strengthen the data collection and reporting systems to ensure that project progress is tracked efficiently and any delays are identified early for corrective actions.

Financial Management and Disbursement Rate Improvement:

Focus on improving the financial absorption rate by addressing the delays in disbursement and ensuring that the remaining funds are effectively utilized by the end of the project extension period.

Strengthen financial monitoring to ensure timely disbursements and prevent further delays in funding allocation for planned activities.

By focusing on these actions, the project aims to overcome the challenges faced during 2024, build on its achievements, and ensure the successful implementation of activities during the extended timeline.

Budget Variance Analysis for the Current Reporting Period

Total Approved Budget for the Current Reporting Period

3,564,857

Total Expenditure for the Current Reporting Period

1,702,685

Explanation for underspending or overspending in excess of 10%

School Feeding Component: This component has 96.6% underspending, primarily due to delays in the tender for kitchen equipment for 45 schools.

Blended Learning Component: There was 30.2% underspending because the final payment for the consulting firm is scheduled for the first quarter of 2025. Some activities (training) were completed at a lower cost than planned.

Level of Management Performance

Satisfactory (S)

Previous Rating

Satisfactory (S)

Detailed Description

Financial Management:

During this reporting period, there were no significant adverse impacts on grant implementation in terms of financial management. In accordance with Financing agreement MOF is responsible for all matters relating to the budgeting and utilization of the allocation for the activities and MOF ensured: 1) a suitably qualified person is handling the day-to-day management of funds and book-keeping; 2) all bank and other financial transactions related to the Allocation are tracked and reported in a transparent manner, including to ensure all expenditure of the funds to be isolated, identified and accounted for; 3) accurate records of account of the Allocation are kept; 4) any interest earned on the allocation will be applied for use on the Activities; and 5) expenses are specified in MOF account books in at least the same level of detail as such expenses appear in the budget so that the accounts are reported and verifiable against the budget.

The payment transactions were registered monthly in the "Agresso" system of the Grant agent and "Odamis" system of Treasury Fund of Mongolia. The project funding followed government financial management protocols, such as administering advances, budgeting, and statement of expenditures procedures, as outlined in Government Resolution 176. There were no concerns with financial management.

Procurement management:

According to the project document, procurement procedures are carried out in compliance with Mongolian Procurement Law. As a grant agent, Save the Children was responsible for the following tasks to ensure that ME followed and implemented procurement law: 1) Attending in each procurement as a member of the Bid Evaluation Committee. 2) Conducting a prior review of each procurement's technical specifications and bidding documents, 3) Providing no objections to the announcement of the bid. 4) Review the evaluation results and have no objections to awarding the contract to the winner.

Program implementation and monitoring:

In 2024, the Grant Agent (GA) undertook several responsibilities to ensure effective program implementation and monitoring. These included:

Spot Check: Conducted to verify that activities adhered to the endorsed annual plan and approved program document. All reviewed activities received no objection.

Policy Implementation: Followed and enforced the Policy on ESPIGs, covering approval processes, implementation timelines, reporting requirements, revisions, and amendments.

Technical Support: Provided ongoing support to the ME and the PIU to strengthen government capacity.

Outcome Assessment: Assisted the government in evaluating program quality and effectiveness while identifying optimal programmatic solutions.

Issue Resolution: Collaborated with the government to promptly address challenges that could affect program outcomes or the achievement of variable part targets.

Notable Activities:

A mission from SCA visited Mongolia from March 24–30, 2024, to:

Collaborate on project implementation.

Review project progress and address challenges causing delays.

Discuss and implement necessary adjustments to project scope and arrangements.

Address any other matters requiring GA's attention.

SCA also conducted quarterly online meetings to:

Oversee project implementation.

Address emerging challenges.

Discuss action plans for future phases.

Provide structural support to stakeholders.

The ME conducted Monitoring and Evaluation to target schools in aimags and UB districts from June 12–26, 2024. (Details are available in the attached Monitoring Report.)

This comprehensive approach demonstrates the GA's commitment to fostering collaboration, addressing challenges, and ensuring the successful implementation of the program.

Stakeholder Collaboration:

Proactive efforts by project stakeholders, including Save the Children Japan, Save the Children Australia, the Embassy of Japan in Mongolia, and the Project Steering Committee, have ensured seamless coordination in the implementation of the project. In other management aspects, operations are progressing smoothly without notable issues.

Local Education Group: The first meeting was held on 14 March, 2023 and formally established Local Education Group. The third meeting conducted on December 6, 2024, through a high-level consultation meeting, agreed to extend the project period by 6 months at no cost.

Ministry of Education: As the project implementing organization, the ME had the responsibility of overseeing and managing all activities under the project. This included validating orders and decisions related to these activities. In 2024, a total of 23 ministerial and State Secretarial orders, as well as 4 resolutions from the Project Steering Committee, were duly approved.

Multiplier Partners and Collaborators: The multiplier partner organizations, integral members of the LEG, actively engage in LEG meetings and contribute to collaborative initiatives as outlined in the project document. At the project implementation level, Multiplier partners in Mongolia such as JICA, KOICA, and SCJ, and Development partners such as ADB and UNICEF, work closely together to implement

Component 1: Inclusive Education and Component 2: School Feeding, and Component 3: Blended Learning.

Please refer Annex 9: Involvement of multiplier partners in the EQUAL project implementation.

Ministry of Finance: In fulfillment of its responsibilities outlined in the Grant Financing Agreement, the Ministry of Finance actively carried out the timely disbursement of essential project expenses. Additionally, serving as a key member of the Project Steering Committee, the representatives of the Ministry participated in committee meetings and demonstrated a commitment to addressing any challenges encountered in the project's operations. This collaborative engagement highlights the Ministry's crucial role in financial support and strategic decision-making for the successful implementation of the project.

Revisions to the grant

This period, have there been any revisions to the grant other than those submitted to the GPE Board or Secretariat for their approval?

No

How likely is that the grant agent will submit a request for revision to the GPE Board or Secretariat in the next 12 months for their approval?

Moderately Likely

Detailed Description

During the project implementation period, \$607,371 was saved through procurement and tax incentives, and some activities were completed at lower than planned costs. The PIU and the implementing ministry presented a request to the LEG meeting to extend the project implementation period by 6 months and fully utilize the saving grant, which was unanimously approved by the meeting participants. The LEG members approved a no-cost extension of 6 months of the project implementation period during its meeting on December 6, 2024.

Based on this, the GA has submitted a request for a no cost extension in March 2025 to GPE.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of Acronyms

Acronym	Description
AESB	Aimag Education and Science Department
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BEC	Bid Evaluation Committee
CA	Coordinating Agency
CSDN	Children with Special Dietary Needs
EQUAL	Enabling Equity to Advanced Learning
GA	Grant Agent
GAE	General Authority for Education

GPE	Global Partnership for Education
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MUST	Mongolian University of Science and Technology
NCB	National Competitive Bidding
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
SCA	Save the Children Australia
SCJ	Save the Children Japan
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
LEG	Local Education Group
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOFALI	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry

Annex 2: Global Numbers Reporting Template

Provide the data related to GPE's three global numbers for this reporting period below

- Textbooks purchased and distributed through GPE grants
- Teachers trained through GPE grants
- Classrooms built or rehabilitated through GPE grants

Note: For cofinanced grants, please provide the proportion that can be attributed to GPE grant. For example, if the grant's financial contribution accounts for 50 percent of a teacher training activity, the proportion that can be attributed to GPE grant for the number of teachers trained through that activity would be 50%. If the unit of analysis in the indicator is the number of schools and not classrooms, please enter an estimated number of classrooms and provide an explanation in the comments box.

GPE Indicators

Textbooks purchased and distributed

#	Indicator	Actual Number Achieved (during this reporting period)	This system transformation grant annual progress report is learning oriented and seeks to:	Comments
1	Textbooks for children under activity 1.1.5 of the component 1 of the project	0		In total (since beginning of grant; 0 in this reporting period), 90 braille textbooks were provided to children with disabilities whose parents participated in a classroom training session focused on "Strengthening the capacity of parents to participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of Individualized Education Plans".

GPE Indicators

Teachers trained

#	Indicator	Actual Number Achieved (during this reporting period)	This system transformation grant annual progress report is learning oriented and seeks to:	Comments
1	Teachers trained under activity 1.1.1	2,294		In aggregate, 4693 teachers and administrators actively participated in the classroom training sessions, contributing to the enhancement of their knowledge and skills in inclusive education practices.
2	Teachers trained as Trainer under activity 1.1.1	0		In total (since beginning of grant; 0 in this reporting period),to conduct the training outlined in Activity 1.1.1 of Component 1, a total of 80 trainers underwent comprehensive training, utilizing a combination of in-person and online sessions.
3	Teachers trained under activity 1.1.5	36		In collaboration with the General Authority of Education, 2 teachers from each of the targeted mainstream schools, totaling 36, received a 4-hour module training on the topic "Reflection on the current situation of inclusive education."

4	Number of networks for teachers newly established and providing continuous support for teachers (act 1.1.2)	6		With a target of 4, 6 networks have been established in collaboration with the MoE; to create networks for teachers around specific types of disabilities
5	Number of teachers trained on pedagogy skills on blended learning (act 3.2.5)	900		A total of 1320 teachers were trained on basic pedagogy skills utilizing blended learning to support teaching at the right level, differentiated learning through IEPs, continuous formative assessment, etc.

GPE Indicators

Classrooms built or rehabilitated

#	Indicator	Actual Number Achieved (during this reporting period)	This system transformation grant annual progress report is learning oriented and seeks to:	Comments
1	Student Support Development Classrooms built	18		18 Student Support Development Classrooms are built in target schools of component 1 of the project and fully equipped with assistive devices for children with disabilities, furniture, computer, textbooks etc. funded by EQUAL project.

Annex 3: Cumulative Beneficiary Children Reporting Template

Provide the **cumulative** number of children of pre-primary, primary and secondary school age (both in school and out of school) and other students (adolescents beyond secondary school age and adult learners participating in basic education programs), who **directly participated in project activities, received project-supported incentives or services, or benefited from project interventions so far. Also provide relevant disaggregated values by sex (applicable to all grants).** If appropriate and available, provide disaggregated values by varied subgroups and by education level. Reporting beneficiary data cumulatively means counting all beneficiaries as a running total, adding up all beneficiaries since the start of the grant. Data on beneficiaries are to be collected using the methods and tools proper to each project. It is understood that some disaggregated data will only be collected if a project expressly targets specific subgroups through their interventions and uses their own methods for counting beneficiary children/other students.[i] Please provide the number or proportion of girls of varied subgroups in the comment section below, if available.

NOTE: For cofinanced grants, please provide the numbers for the entire program and indicate the proportion that can be attributed to GPE grant. For example, if the grant's financial contribution accounts for 40 percent of the program that is cofinanced by GPE and other donors, enter 40% in "% attributed to this grant".

	Pre-primary (optional)	Primary (optional)	Secondary (optional)	Others (optional)	Total	% attributed to this grant (for cofinanced grants)
Number of children who directly benefited from					10,320	

the project so far:

Of which, girls:			5,204			
------------------	--	--	-------	--	--	--

Of which, children with a disability (optional):			997			
--	--	--	-----	--	--	--

Of which, refugee children (optional):						
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Of which, internally displaced children (optional):						
---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Of which, out-of-school children, in school age (optional):						
---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Of which, children from marginalized ethno-cultural/ linguistic minorities: specify which ones (optional):						
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Provide any comments on beneficiary children, if needed. This could include, for example, the definition employed by the grant for a particular subgroup (including a more granular description of these subgroups), the approach/tool used to calculate the number of beneficiaries overall or by subgroup, any limitation of the approach/tool employed for this calculation and reasons why data on beneficiary children are unavailable. Please provide the number or proportion of girls for varied subgroups in the comment section below, if available.

Please see attachment 5 for more breakdown of students (direct = 10,320; nad indirect = 10,131)

Annex 4: GEA Indicators Reporting Template

GEA Core indicators	Baseline	Results for this reporting period		GPE contribution (optional for cofinanced grants)	Comments
		Target	Actual		
Indicator name					
Date					

1 Highly Unsatisfactory - The project has major shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is unlikely. Unsatisfactory - The project has significant shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is uncertain. Moderately Unsatisfactory - The project has moderate shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs, but a resolution is likely. Moderately Satisfactory - The project is expected to achieve most of its major outputs efficiently with moderaten shortcomings or delays. Satisfactory - The project is expected to achieve almost all of its major outputs efficiently with only minor shortcomings or delays. Highly Satisfactory -The project is expected to achieve or exceed all of the major outputs efficiently without significant shortcomings or delays.

2 Highly Unsatisfactory - The component/objective has major shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is unlikely. Unsatisfactory -The component/objective has significant shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is uncertain. Moderately Unsatisfactory -The component/objective has moderate shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs, but a resolution is likely. Moderately Satisfactory- The component/objective is expected to achieve most of its major outputs efficiently with moderate shortcomings or delays. Satisfactory- The component/objective is expected to achieve almost all of its major outputs efficiently with only minor shortcomings or delays. Highly Satisfactory-The component/objective is expected to achieve or exceed all of the major outputs efficiently without significant shortcomings or delays.

3 Highly Unsatisfactory – The GEA has major shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is unlikely. Unsatisfactory – The GEA has significant shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is uncertain. Moderately Unsatisfactory – The GEA has moderate shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs, but a resolution is likely. Moderately Satisfactory – The GEA is expected to achieve most of its major outputs efficiently with moderate shortcomings or delays. Satisfactory – The GEA is expected to achieve almost all of its major outputs efficiently with only minor shortcomings or delays. Highly Satisfactory – The GEA is expected to achieve or exceed all of the major outputs efficiently without significant shortcomings or delays.