



Education Fund – Project Proposal Template

COVID-19 & Education Funding Window

Date:

From

To:

Copy (email) to:

1. Title and short summary of the proposed project

Title: Uninterrupted access to teaching-learning for hard-to-reach and digitally disadvantaged children in Bhutan

Summary: *TV and internet-based learning leaves out about 17,000 children with no access to these technologies. With the Ministry of Education, media, and private firms, learning materials and teaching methods will be adapted to reach these children through self-learning materials/guides, and radio stations. In parallel, as reach of internet and TV grows, ongoing trials in e-learning will be strengthened and teachers trained to institutionalize ICT in education.*

2. Process Data (Summary)

| | |
|--|---|
| Applicant Name: | |
| Visum (Date and Signature): | |
| Unit: | |
| Responsible Desk Officer at HQ | |
| Visum (Date and Signature): | |
| Budget needed: | |
| Budget Nr. | |
| Target group (# and type of beneficiaries) | <i>30% of students in primary and secondary schools in Bhutan without access to digital learning services of whom 50% are girls; 50% of students in two critical grades (XI and XII) of whom at least 30% are girls</i> |



| | |
|---|--|
| Impact hypothesis | <i>Through adapted learning materials and teaching methodologies, use of digital technology, capacitated teachers, and networks built with the media and private firms, hard to reach and digitally disadvantaged school children in Bhutan are able to continue their schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as have access to improved and equitable teaching-learning options for the future.</i> |
| Overall goal | <i>To enhance inclusion and equity in basic education through targeted solutions for the hard-to-reach, and digitally disadvantaged children and youth in Bhutan.</i> |
| Outcomes and outputs (of fund) | <p><i>Outcome 1: Barriers to learning caused by unequal access to digital technologies are reduced for school children during the COVID-19 pandemic</i></p> <p><i>Output 1.1: Teaching-learning materials and support structure are adapted to reach digitally disadvantaged children</i></p> <p><i>Output 1.2: Selected teachers and facilitators are prepared and deployed to provide periodic support while maintaining precautionary safety standards</i></p> <p><i>Outcome 2: Strengthened quality of digital learning for current and future contingencies</i></p> <p><i>Output 2.1: Effectiveness of standard and materials of on-going digital learning are reviewed and improved</i></p> <p><i>Output 2.2: Adapted materials are delivered through a combination of digital medium</i></p> <p><i>Outcome 3: Increased future preparedness of education system to provide equitable teaching-learning options</i></p> <p><i>Output 3.1: Partnerships established with TV, radio and private digital firms</i></p> <p><i>Output 3.2: Use of digital technology in primary and secondary education increased</i></p> |
| Contract partner/s | <i>Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation</i> |
| Coordination and synergies with other projects and actors | <i>Royal Education Council, Teachers of Bhutan Volunteers project, HELVETAS dual training project, UNICEF (e.g. education in emergencies materials)</i> |
| Project Duration (start and end of project) | <i>From 25th May to 31st December, 2020</i> |



3. Funding

Total Budget (detailed budget in annex):

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|--|
| |
|--|

Subject of funding:

☐ Pilot project ☐ New activities in ongoing SDC programs

☒ Small project

Fully funded: The project handed in is fully funded (by the Education Fund's contribution and eventually with co-funding of the applying SDC division and/or a third party)

☒ Yes ☐ No - If no what is the SDC co-financing percentage?: _____

4. Project Description

(Please add logframe in Annex)

1. Impact/challenges of Covid-19-crisis on education?

Since early March 2020, all schools in Bhutan have been closed as a preventive measure against COVID-19. This has directly affected 165,081 students (50.8% girls) in 529 primary and secondary schools around the country. There is no definite duration of this closure; recent indications are that since there are risks of local transmission of corona virus, the decision for closure would continue. Should the situation improve locally and globally, a gradual opening may begin region-wise and not all at once.

The Ministry of Education of Bhutan has begun TV-based teaching and learning. Some schools have also initiated lessons through social apps and google classroom. Experiences from implementing these initiatives for more than a month have shown the following:

- *Approximately 17,000 students of which about 51% are girls do not have access to TV, and hence cannot access the on-going TV-based learning.*
- *The disruption in learning is mainly in remote and rural areas, and for urban families who cannot afford (the rather high) internet packages to use google classrooms and social apps on an everyday basis.*
- *The risk of deepening education inequalities between urban and rural areas, and for poor urban families and children with disabilities is very high.*



- *Even for those with access to the on-going TV and google classroom-based learning, strengthening the quality and consistency of the programs and preparedness of teachers to these unfamiliar methodologies is needed. This is especially useful for the future when the usage of internet and access to digital technologies expands.*
- *The focus of the state is currently on health, and rightly so. Therefore, targeted intervention in education is needed while ensuring that it is built into the national education sector plan and policies (specifically the 12th FYP of the government)*

2. Envisaged Covid-19 response

It is expected that through adapted learning materials and teaching methodologies, use of digital technology, capacitated teachers, and networks built with the media and private firms, hard to reach and digitally disadvantaged school children in Bhutan are able to continue their schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as have access to improved and equitable teaching-learning options for the future.

Towards this, there are three expected outcomes:

*Outcome 1: Barriers to learning caused by **unequal access** to digital technologies are reduced for school children of whom 50% are girls during the COVID-19 pandemic*

This outcome is specifically to reach children and youth with no access to the internet, to TV or even radio. Teaching-learning materials will be adapted into self-instructional materials and provided for 30% of digitally disadvantaged students out of which 50% are girls. This will be combined with training in order to prepare a selected group of teachers and facilitators to provide periodic face-to-face support to these students while maintaining precautionary safety standards (small numbers on a rotation basis, social distancing, recommended hygiene practices, large classroom or other spaces such as community centers).

*Outcome 2: Strengthened **quality** of digital learning for current and future contingencies*

This outcome is specifically to reach students in critical grades (grades X and XII), and to improve on-going trials in using TV and social apps for learning in order to benefit the entire student population. On-going TV based programs and teaching materials will be improved in quality with a specific focus on critical grades and their delivery reach will be expanded through radio and google classroom. In parallel, teachers will be trained on the use of google classroom and other e-teaching and learning platforms, and teaching-learning materials will be adapted into radio and e-learning formats for current and future use. Under both access and quality, awareness materials on themes that are relevant to the current pandemic and other vulnerabilities the country is exposed to will be developed particularly on climate change, and hygiene.

*Outcome 3: Increased **future preparedness** of education system to provide equitable teaching-learning options*

This outcome focuses on documenting experiences and lessons (what worked, what did not work, why) and building on these to mainstream use of ICT in the education system in the post COVID-19 era. Partnerships with TV and radio stations will be established, and private IT firms will be contracted to convert content into stimulating e-formats.

3. Intervention Strategy

Social equity is at the heart of the intervention strategy. The Ministry of Education and schools have begun TV and internet-based teaching learning after schools were closed in early March 2020. With about 17,000 school children and youth left out of these teaching-learning processes, the proposal will focus on bridging this gap on the one hand, and strengthening the current technology-based learning process on the other in preparation for future disruptions. Current education structures will be used, i.e. all coordination of the



proposal will be done with the Policy and Planning Division of the Ministry of Education and Schools, the use of existing infrastructure (computer laboratories, community centers, community radio, etc) will all be explored, and the engagement of local government will be sought for decentralized implementation.

Documentation of experiences and uptake of lessons (what worked well; what not; why) will receive focus as a basis for institutionalization of ICT use in delivery of education. These lessons and learning will be disseminated within the country as well as shared and disseminated with SDC Focal Points Education and E+I for further exchanges and cross-learning.

The media will be actively engaged, and the services of private IT firms will be used to convert content into required TV, radio and other formats.

The proposal plans to reach approximately 30% of school children and youth, and 50% of youth in two critical learning grades (grades X and XII, from 15 to 18 years old, secondary education). The schools and districts will be selected based on the following criteria: Least accessible in terms of TV, radio and internet reach; and Number of children and youth.

4. Transition from emergency to recovery

Speeding up efforts to reach the unreached: Bhutan's current five-year plan (2018-2023) acknowledges that a challenge the education system faces is reaching children in remote areas, nomadic communities, migrant population, children with learning disabilities, and those who drop out due to physical distance to schools. The use of ICT is seen as one of the ways of overcoming the challenge. The Ministry of Education's ICT masterplan foresees 3 strategic thrusts: enhance ICT capacity among students and teachers (iAble); strengthen IT use and integration in the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment system (iBuild); and enhance IT education infrastructure (iConnect). However, the implementation of these aspirations has been slow and often deprioritized. The project is expected to contribute towards speeding up efforts to catch up on use of ICT to improve access to learning and inclusion after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preparing for future disruptions: The project will also contribute towards preparing the country for future disruptions in learning. This is particularly needed as the country is exposed to multiple hazards, most notably climate-induced glacial lake outburst floods, monsoon landslides, earthquakes, winter forest fires and so forth.

Distance and online learning become real options on other sectors and age groups: distance learning and online learning options are missing or highly limited in the current learning scenario. Lessons from the project is expected to play a part in considering distance learning and online options within technical and vocational training and education and for those in workplaces and life long learners.

This proposal is presented by SDC India, Global Programme Climate Change and Environment (GPCCE). GPCCE is active in the South Asia region including Bhutan supporting among others climate change adaption initiatives in mountain ecosystems. In this sense, the current proposal can be considered as a contribution to the resilience of mountain communities to different types of risks. In the present case in relation with the COVID-19 crisis. However, the project is also relevant and will contribute to an improved access of education also in cases of climate-related and natural disasters events.

Potential for post-crisis scaling-up?:

☒ Yes ☐ No



Comment on Scaling-up potential:

Contributing towards preparing for future learning disruptions and promoting greater inclusion is a key element of the project. Therefore, documentation of experiences both good and challenging, their dissemination, and use of existing structures with a view to integrating experiences as far as possible into the education system are strategies to scale up. The same lessons will be relevant for the vocational skills sector as well. Connecting project activities to the country's five-year plan challenges and to the Ministry of Education's own ICT aspirations have been made to prompt transitioning of project ideas into the post-pandemic phase.

5. Selection criteria

Please tick the applicable boxes:

- ☒ to kick-off and/or reinforce approaches described in SDC's Education Strategy
- ☒ to test innovation in basic education (BE) and vocational skills development (VSD)
- ☐ to start or scale up educational components in programmes of other sectors or to create synergies between another sector and education

Alignment with orientations and approaches described in SDC's Education Strategy:

Guiding questions for the Review Committee include whether the project is in line with the orientations and approaches of the SDC Education Strategy.

The Project contributes to SDC's commitment to basic education as a right and a common good. Particularly, the project contributes to "inclusion and equity" by enhancing equitable access to basic education with special attention to children in hard-to-reach communities and from poor families and opens up greater flexibility for the future for those who may be excluded. This would not be long lasting without being linked to "education system governance." Therefore, the project focuses on the education delivery system as a whole and will work with policy makers and education specialists including teachers. It will get the media involved as an important stakeholder and private IT firms as experts contributing to increased education efficiency and effectiveness. "Quality and Relevance" is enhanced through teacher training in new modes of delivery and adapting the curriculum for different formats.

Project is innovative and/or reinforces approaches proposed in the SDC Education strategy?

Education services is seen as the domain of the Ministry of education and schools alone. The intended partnership with the media and private firms is an innovative approach. The media will be roped in as an increasingly important stakeholder that affect the way young people access knowledge and interpret information, and to introduce new ways of delivering education services, and private firms as experts in converting curriculum into different user ready formats and assisting content experts. The use of Google classroom and other e-platforms, and radio including community radio for teaching-learning is new to Bhutan. To ensure that the unfamiliarity of these mediums does not create a barrier, preparing teachers together with IT firms and media will receive focus.



The proposal takes a “system strengthening” approach. Although the state capacity is over-stretched in attempting to respond to the pandemic, the project activities and results are coordinated with the government and aligned with its medium and long-term goals. Interlinkages with other themes is another approach, particularly hygiene which is relevant to the current pandemic and climate change which is a topic Bhutan is vulnerable to. As HELVETAS is engaged in vocational skills development in Bhutan, complementary learning and sharing of lessons in basic education from the project will be promoted in vocational skills development.

6. Required annex:

Please use SDC standard-templates

- Detailed budget sheet
- Logframe
- Checklist for scoring the SDC Gender Policy Marker in the SAP
- List of SAP characteristics

Thank you!

Kindly submit proposal to: