

ANNEX 4 – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Position: Political Economy Analysis adviser

Programme: Promoting Women's and Girls' Education in ASEAN

Requirement: Political Economy Analysis service for Inception Phase of Promoting Women and Girls' Education in ASEAN.

Period of consultancy: August to October 2023 (12 days)

Purpose

The purpose of the political economy analysis (PEA) is to establish and examine the factors and forces that generate and prolong learning poverty, in a variety of forms, across countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) particularly among girls and members of marginalised groups from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam (CLMV) as well as Timor-Leste; and to identify potential strategic pathways and opportunities for a new programme that seeks to address these problems.

The PEA will guide the programme in its further design and implementation, particularly in selecting and deploying senior consultants and identifying the right 'levels' to work at, and institutions and stakeholder networks to work through. The PEA will accomplish this by critiquing the norms and rules, social and cultural practices, beliefs and values, and historical and geographical determinants that constrain and enable progressive change in regional and national education policy and practice.

Background

ASEAN has recognised the importance of access to quality learning for all in successive declarations and plans. The ASEAN Declaration on 'STRENGTHENING EDUCATION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND YOUTH (OOSCY)' (2016) recognises that in parts of ASEAN, significant numbers of OOSCY call for action on achieving equal access to education, improved retention and completion of education. The 2019 Bangkok Declaration commits to advancing partnerships in education as part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This will include promoting inclusive education at all levels of education and training to eliminate disparities for the vulnerable and marginalized, those with special needs, and OOSCY. The ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-25 sets out a plan to improve access to quality education for disadvantaged youth.

However, despite these public commitments and progress in some areas, learning poverty persists, restricting acquisition of basic literacy, numeracy and key transferable skills to significant numbers of ASEAN's children, especially in CLMV - countries at the centre of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration

(IAI), which aims to close the development gap with other AMS – and Timor-Leste¹. COVID-19 saw over 140 million children experiencing lost learning due to school closures, but the pandemic had a distorted impact, amplifying pre-existing inequalities among the most marginalised, primarily women and girls in rural and poor urban areas, and the disabled. World Bank data shows that a number of ASEAN countries still struggle with high numbers of children out of primary school, most of which are girls.

The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has committed £30m over five years to support developing countries in ASEAN to deploy influencing and knowledge-based strategic investments that can leverage education spending through greater uptake of evidence-informed approaches. Evidence from the PEA will shape a particular programme that will use the British Council's world-class expertise, partnerships and influence to transform the effectiveness of what governments and donors already spend on education, and thereby make a significant contribution to tackling learning poverty in the region across a number of problem areas, described below.

Foundational learning

Regional studies have highlighted continued concern around *foundational learning*. Resource imbalance affects learning, with children learning in larger, well-resourced schools performing better than smaller, less well-equipped schools and where there is a lack of qualified or specialist teachers. Significant proportions of both girls and boys struggle to reach expected levels of performance in reading, writing and numeracy, and crucially, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have significantly redrawn the landscape of foundational learning performance and created a large, unevenly distributed learning loss.

Out-of-school girls

Plan International Australia estimated that more than 1.2 million pre-primary to upper secondary *girls were at risk of dropping out of school* due to the impact of the pandemic. This is in addition to the 15 million girls who were already out of school before the pandemic. Twenty percent of girls in the East Asia Pacific region – 40 million in total – were not reached by distance learning delivered online or through TV or radio, due to the lack of devices and / or policies geared towards their needs. 2.5 million girls are at risk of child, early and forced marriage by 2025 because of the pandemic². The extent to

¹ Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN has been agreed in principle, and the country will be included as part of this programme and the PEA research.

² Smart, Successful, Strong: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EDUCATION IN AID AND COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY, Plan International Australia

which these consequences will reinforce existing structural and cultural barriers affecting girls' access to quality education, and the unevenness of such an impact across the region, is unknown.

Greater educational inclusion

The IAI & Narrowing the Development Gap (NDG) are also tasked with fostering greater educational inclusion for CLMV and, as a SEAMEO member country and planned future ASEAN member, Timor-Leste. Financial burdens of schooling, child labour, migration and displacement, language and ethnicity, disability, and legal and administrative matters are believed to play an important role in maintaining patterns of unequal educational outcomes within the region, with disproportionate impacts on girls and other marginalised groups. It is unclear whether, and how, changes in post-pandemic economies, political strategies, geopolitical developments and climate change may have reinforced or ameliorated these factors, advancing or placing obstacles ahead of efforts towards *greater educational inclusion*.

Gender disparities in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education

The programme also recognises, and seeks to address, *gender disparities in STEM education*. As in other parts of the world, there is a notable underrepresentation of women in scientific careers in the Asia-Pacific region with for example, only 24% of research positions being held by women. Low levels of female participation in STEM education appear to be socio-culturally determined: a lack of role models and mentoring for female students, social undervaluation of females in STEM careers, stereotyping in teaching materials and instructional approaches and scarcity of different modes of learning appear to discourage female students from pursuing STEM education.

Women's employment in STEM careers, and digital skills

The transition from education to *employment in quality STEM careers* appears further problematic, particularly for those women from poor and marginalised groups. Attitudes and views about the roles, rights and potential of girls and women, family expectations, media portrayals and other cultural factors appear to play a key role in shaping girls' and women's goals and perceptions of self. However, employer expectations, employment structures and representation at leadership level in relevant government posts and policy making circles in ASEAN, which together may contribute more significantly to the persistence of barriers to access. New forms of digital divides around wealth, geography, gender and language risk further entrenching marginalisation.

Main questions for exploration

Suppliers may use their experience and insights to add and / or amend to the questions below, in order to further meet the overall purpose of the PEA outlined above. However, we expect the work to cover at least the questions set out below.

- What are the main socioeconomic forces shaping the direction of education policy in CLMV and Timor-Leste, and across ASEAN as a whole? How have national contingencies, including history, geography and culture, served to produce different outcomes in different countries? What have been the key changes in education policy – as it affects the main areas of interests for the programme – in recent years? Assess also the benefits, risks and overall usefulness of CLMV + Timor-Leste as a cogent target country group for the programme.
- Identify the main institutions formally responsible for shaping the content and direction of education policy, particularly in CLMV and Timor-Leste. Define and examine the main interests of dominant groups within – and beyond – these key institutions and describe how these have shaped responses – if any – and responsiveness towards addressing the needs of out of school children, marginalised groups, girls’ attainment in STEM and related programme goals. Describe the overall political will and appetite for reform across relevant institutions.
- Examine the relationship between SEAMEO, AMS education departments and other national policy making institutions. Evaluate the main channels of influence between these bodies, with a particular focus on factors that enable and constrain success in achieving progress towards targets. To what extent have ASEAN-wide initiatives helped to overcome barriers to accessing quality education for excluded groups? How do ASEAN initiatives filter through layers of education policy making and implementation in AMS, particularly in CLMV and Timor-Leste?
- How have mainstream beliefs, conventions, values, shared understandings and dominant norms affected access to quality education for different excluded groups at national and regional levels? To what extent do assumption of dominant groups – with regards to gender, ethnicity, language, able bodies and other categories – shape access to, and success in, the education system?

- How do power dynamics converge to produce differential outcomes for different excluded or marginalised groups? To what degree are variations across the region perceptible, what generates and maintains these differences?
- To what extent have the interests and influences of minority or excluded groups, including women, been able to find representation, voice and influence in education? What forms has this taken, and what is the perception of these interests among traditionally dominant groups? Have alliances across groups – including employers, the private sector – been able to sustainably open space for progressive action in education policy making and implementation?
- Identify realistic pathways by which the programme can contribute to improving inclusion and attainment for marginalised groups. Sketch out scenarios and intervention logics by which excluded groups can gain greater influence in education, with a particular focus on foundational learning, STEM and digital. Describe any recent efforts to address the problems, assess degree of success, explore reasons behind failure(s) Reference other ongoing or planned interventions, identifying gaps, potential overlaps and opportunities for the programme to reinforce other actions.
- Describe the operational implications for the programme. With reference to the causal pathways identified above, identify entry points for engagement and investment. Sketch high-level potential pilot projects or larger draft interventions that may productively leverage the British Council's reputation for creating productive partnerships, combine long-term trends, emerging receptivity to new ideas and coalitions of actors able to generate change, including local initiatives that may get national or regional recognition.

Levels of analysis

The programme seeks to approach these issues both discretely, as singular issues, and as issues affecting particular AMS more than others, but also to tease out and address common factors that link them and create system-wide obstacles to progress in education and, later, employment for marginalised groups in South East Asia

The programme recognises that successful strategic investments that improve learning outcomes for marginalised groups in low-resource settings, and ensuring that governments stay the course on policy delivery, must address a breadth of factors located both within learning institutions and beyond, in

the lifeworld of marginalised groups themselves. Tackling broad foundational issues elevates the importance of effective partnerships, data collection and data sharing between regional, state and non-state bodies.

Methodology

Suppliers will be expected to collect, analyse and present largely qualitative or mixed data as part of the research.

Suppliers should ensure that research assumptions and approaches are sufficiently realist to identify and explain developments in the programme's core areas of concern over time, and to identify causal pathways the programme may use in seeking to achieve its objectives.

PEA research is expected to use a combination of the following research methods:

- *Desk reviews* of relevant documentation and evidence, including existing analysis, 'grey' literature, news reports and other sources. It is vital that sources of information are sufficiently broad that the views and experience of marginalised target groups, and genuinely critical reports on the functioning and performance of key institutions, are included.
- *Key informant interviews*. A wide range of KIIs should be undertaken. Representatives from key institutions, organisations, multilateral agencies and local NGOs are expected to be among interviewees.
- *Quantitative data*, including surveys and statistical reports, into relevant programming areas have been produced by numerous organisations and may be included or referred to as part of the research.

The supplier should adhere to the highest standards of research ethics and demonstrate this in planning. The design should also show how the research process will account for and alleviate any bias or distortion arising from power disparities in gender or ethnicity, particularly when conducting KIIs.

Outputs

- A final report of no more than 30 pages, including an executive summary; main findings from the five key focus countries, as well as insights and findings from other ASEAN nations as is relevant to the programme's objectives; technical and strategic recommendations for programme implementation, including identification of key stakeholders, formal and non-formal groupings, coalitions and other actors useful for programme success;
- A slide deck / PowerPoint presentation, summarising key findings in an accessible and presentable format.

Risk management

The supplier should anticipate any risks and present a full risk management plan as part of their submission.

Researcher profile

The required qualifications and professional experience for the supplier are as follows:

Qualifications

- Post-graduate qualification in an appropriate social science discipline, such as political science, sociology, geography, regional studies, education, international relations, human rights.

General Professional Experience

- A minimum of 5 years' experience conducting social / qualitative research activities;
- A minimum of 10 years' experience working as part of a team on large-scale development programmes;
- Demonstrable experience in, and understanding of, the basic education sector in South East Asia, particularly as relating to inclusion and the experience of marginalised groups.

Specific Professional Experience

- Demonstrated ability to lead research activities, including design of methodology;
- Demonstrated ability to produce and present high-quality analysis;
- Experience of managing multi-country research, with a preference for those suppliers who have explored power dynamics within complex national and regional institutional arrangements;
- Experience of thinking and working politically as a programme strategy;
- Proven ability to convert technical research findings into strategic programme advice and recommendations;

Timeframe

The assignment requires a maximum input of **12 days**. The final report is due for submission on **Friday 29 September 2023**.

Payment Terms

Payment of the Services will be processed within 30 days after all deliverables completed and invoicing documents submitted to British Council.