PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

A. Introduction

1. The Seismic Safety Improvement Program will support the implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, focusing on management and reduction of seismic disaster risks. While most of the public buildings in the country need strengthening or reconstruction to meet seismic safety standards, the government has prioritized school buildings for seismic strengthening and reconstruction. In response to this, the Seismic Safety Improvement Program will focus on improving seismic safety of school buildings to reduce casualties and damage during earthquakes and enable better use of school buildings as shelters for the general public and as focal points for emergency response after earthquakes. The program monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system assessment was therefore conducted in this context.

B. Description of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

2. Existing M&E systems in Armenia which are related to the program are fragmented and are in varying stages of development. Most of the M&E systems have been developed in the context of donor-funded projects. In general, data collection and analysis have been widely adopted in most public institutions and are largely used for monitoring implementation and management of projects and programs, and for decision making. However, their use appears to vary with institutions. The various M&E systems already in use and which are relevant to the Seismic Safety Improvement Program are described in paras. 3–12.

1. The National Centre of Education Technologies

3. Supported by the World Bank, the National Centre of Education Technologies (NCET), functioning under the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES), has developed a comprehensive data collection and analysis system embodying some critical information related to schools’ performance in terms of educational quality. Indicators include teacher and student numbers, staff–student ratios, drop out and graduation rates, location and condition of school buildings, and administrative data relating to assessment of school equipment and supplies. Annual reports are prepared on these aspects and there are direct links with schools through the various divisions and units of the MOES and local government bodies. The National Institute of Education, which is another entity under the MOES, cooperates with the NCET on matters related to distance education and development of educational materials for schools.

4. The NCET manages data from all educational institutions in Armenia, including vocational and, in recent years, higher education institutions, and makes educational statistics available to both higher authorities in the government and the public. Under the ongoing Education Improvement Project of the World Bank approved in February 2014, the NCET will be developed into a national center for educational statistics, and schools will be provided with adequate information and communication technology coverage. Information on seismic safety standards for schools is also being developed in consultation with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

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5. Although considerable data is generated through a school management information system, the emphasis appears to be on inputs and outputs and less on outcomes. Currently, there are three different departments—the Education Informative Analytical Service Department, the Internet Network Department, and the Information and Communication Technology Department—functioning independently under the NCET. The scope and functions of the Education Informative Analytical Service Department are to be expanded to include evaluations and analysis of outcomes. Closer links are to be established with the other two departments in this regard.

2. The Centre for Education Project

6. The Centre for Education Project (CEP), originally established in October 1996 to manage the first World Bank project,\(^2\) has been the project implementation unit (PIU) for three subsequent projects supported by the World Bank. Operating within the MOES, the CEP has both staff and a core group of consultants to support implementation activities, including procurement, disbursement, monitoring, and management of day-to-day activities. The CEP has gained considerable experience in project management, including monitoring activities, and has effective links with the NCET.

3. Armenian Territorial Development Fund

7. The Armenia Social Investment Fund (ASIF) was renamed the Armenian Territorial Development Fund (ATDF) on 1 April 2015 and given an expanded mandate. ASIF commenced operations in 1996 with World Bank support. Its main focus was originally infrastructure rehabilitation aimed at enhancing the livelihood of the poorest segment of Armenian society. ASIF was established by the Government of Armenia as a mechanism to strengthen local government capacities to manage and promote community development. Since 2000, its operational activities have diversified to include micro projects covering social infrastructure and services, furniture and equipment provision to schools, and projects catering to vulnerable groups. Community participation in the selection and implementation of micro projects has remained a cornerstone of the ATDF’s activities. In recent years, it has gained experience in building and retrofitting small schools and outsourcing seismic safety assessments of schools.

8. M&E activities constitute one of the key areas of the ATDF’s functions. Its organizational structure provides for a management information department with two supporting units—a data generation and office technology unit, and an M&E unit. The department plays an important role in generating data on the ATDF’s micro project activities and also in collecting and processing accounting, costing, and management data for control and supervision purposes. The data generation unit and the M&E unit have gained experience in implementing World Bank projects and are familiar with generating data on inputs and outputs, but appear to be less focused on outcomes and impact. It is recommended that the management information department and the other two units be combined into an M&E department and are brought under the direct supervision of a deputy executive director to facilitate more effective use of monitoring and evaluation data for implementation management and results assessment purposes.

9. Currently only three staff members—one for each unit—are assigned to carry out the functions of the respective units. Additional competent staff and/or consultants will need to be recruited to supplement existing resources to enable the M&E department to carry out baseline

and follow-up surveys, update indicators for outcome and impact assessments, monitor implementation, and prepare reports for accountability and decision-making purposes. Although the function of evaluation as well as the assessment of seismic safety of schools and other buildings is outsourced to private licensed companies, it is desirable that the ATDF acquires expertise to undertake independent verifications of the quality of seismic safeguard measures implemented under the program.

4. Ministry of Urban Development

10. The Ministry of Urban Development (MOUD) develops and implements the policies for urban development. The PIU of the MOUD carries out design and construction supervision, procurement, management, technical assessment, and quality control functions of public building strengthening and renovation, including school buildings. Monitoring functions are carried out by various departments of the PIU, e.g., the project department monitors the process of construction works, the financial department monitors capital spending, and the legal department monitors procurement.

11. Data collected by the PIU includes school seismic safety aspects and technical and economic performance such as minimal conditions for efficiency, volumetric planning, appropriateness of the renovation, and issues relating to accessibility for disabled people. Data collection is implemented by specialized and licensed organizations through on-site examination, measurements, studies, and expert conclusions. Data is collected from local government bodies, school principals, community heads, and stakeholder ministries. Collected data is imported into Microsoft Excel databases, which are updated on a monthly and quarterly basis. No evaluations are undertaken as part of the lesson learning experience but technical evaluations are carried out before and after completion of construction to ensure compliance with approved building standards.

5. National Survey for Seismic Protection

12. The National Survey for Seismic Protection (NSSP) is a state-funded division of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations. The agency's main activities are seismic risk assessment and risk reduction to protect people from impending disasters. The agency conducts technical monitoring through its regional and other ministry divisions and works with the communities to conduct social and psychological assessments and awareness programs. The NSSP’s monitoring functions include technical examination of the school buildings’ construction, quantity and condition of the security exits, signs indicating security exits, the number of students, the availability of evacuation plans in schools, and the presence of security bars on windows. Primary sources of data collection comprise school principals, teachers, and students, and data collection methods include visual assessment and interviews with school principals and focus groups. Data collected are stored in Microsoft Excel or Word formats.

C. Assessment of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

13. The M&E systems relevant to the program in Armenia for carrying out transparent and reliable M&E functions are in varying stages of development. In general, there is a considerable level of understanding of the need for expanding the use of data and analysis for decision-making purposes. There is no interministerial coordinating mechanism or apex body that
manages or synthesizes the vast array of data collected in a fragmented manner by state agencies. The use of data is not always commensurate with the efforts made to collect information. This suggests that a careful assessment needs to be made to determine the types of information required for decision-making purposes.

14. In addition to the collection of data on student and teacher numbers, condition of school buildings, rating of teacher performance, and accounting and administrative matters, it will be essential to incorporate construction-related M&E through baseline and follow-up surveys, and develop appropriate indicators for assessment of outputs, outcome, and results. Training and capacity development of staff involved in M&E are crucial to improving quality control and supervision of construction-based activities.

15. The ATDF needs to work closely in the future with the NCET and CEP. The expansion of the NCET’s activities, including increased M&E work supported by the CEP, would suggest that a coordinating mechanism should be established linking the NCET and CEP to the ATDF to enable them to work together on school-based activities. The ATDF’s operation manual describes in broad terms the activities of the M&E unit, but no provision appears to have been made for the development of annual M&E plans. It is recommended that the ATDF prepares annual M&E plans identifying the scope of work, including a framework for monitoring results-based lending. Regular reviews by ADB should be undertaken at the early stages of project implementation to ensure compliance with requirements of the Seismic Safety Improvement Program.

D. Managing Risks and Improving Capacity

16. Results-based lending is relatively new to Armenia and consequently more capacity-building initiatives and increased technical support are required. There is a need for the ATDF to recruit (i) a seismic engineer who could provide assistance in monitoring designs to ensure that they conform to international standards and quality assurance with regard to construction; and (ii) an M&E specialist to update the M&E system; assist with the development and update of output, outcome, and impact indicators; and provide on-the-job training in the application of standard M&E procedures. While the technical issues relating to design, construction quality, and seismic safety would be assessed by technical experts or consulting companies, the ATDF should have independent capabilities to monitor these activities.

17. The success and sustainability of the Seismic Safety Improvement Program will depend on the efficiency with which a leadership role is assumed by the ATDF to implement a reliable M&E system that highlights the need for timely remedial actions on problems or issues that occur. It is only through rigorous monitoring that the quality of design, construction, and completion can be assured.

18. This assessment suggests that the ATDF’s M&E capabilities should be strengthened as follows to enhance its operational effectiveness and support program implementation:

(i) **Improve status and leverage of the Armenian Territorial Development Fund monitoring and evaluation department.** The existing management information department with two supporting units should be combined into a management, monitoring, and evaluation department headed by a deputy executive director of the ATDF to give it a higher status and greater leverage to implement the revised M&E system which, among others, seeks to strengthen quality control.

(ii) **Increase staff and capacity of the Armenian Territorial Development Fund monitoring and evaluation department to meet new obligations.** The total
number of staff in the existing three units should be increased by two to support the new M&E department. It is essential that consultancy support is provided in the areas of earthquake engineering, procurement, and M&E during the early stages of program implementation. Training should be provided in the monitoring of design, qualitative aspects of construction, procurement of materials and equipment, and in the preparation and implementation of monitoring activities, including update of indicators for assessing outputs, outcome, and impact. The ATDF staff should be further trained in conducting baseline and follow-up surveys and in the analysis and interpretation of seismic safety data. Provision should be made for overseas training and study tours to countries which have experienced seismic hazards to obtain a better understanding of mitigation measures.

(iii) **Revise the Armenian Territorial Development Fund’s management information system forms and prepare annual monitoring and evaluation plan.** Reporting forms or MIS forms should be updated to capture information pertaining to seismic safety standards before and after implementation of the Seismic Safety Improvement Program. A database related to school safety should also be included as part of the ongoing MIS data collection mechanism. It is recommended that the ATDF prepares an annual M&E plan identifying its scope of work including its framework for monitoring results-based lending.

(iv) **Establish an interministerial coordinating mechanism for monitoring and evaluation.** There is a need to establish an interministerial coordinating mechanism, linking the ATDF with the NCET, CEP, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations, MOUD, and NSSP, to enable them to work together on school-based activities, including seismic safety measures, and share information with communities about the status of program implementation. It is recommended that the ATDF’s supervisory board leads this initiative, given its membership encompassing senior officials from all relevant ministries and a number of civil society organizations.