PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

A.   Description of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

1.   The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system of the Ministry of Education (MOE) is guided by the national M&E framework and guidelines issued by the National Planning Commission.[1] The National Development Action Committee (chaired by the Prime Minister) and the Ministerial-level Development Action Committee (chaired by the respective ministers) meet every trimester[2] to review the overall progress of programs and projects, and to discuss any issues of implementation. These committees are entrusted with the overall M&E of policies, programs, and projects on a regular basis, including for MOE. Necessary institutional arrangements for national, regional, district, and school M&E is in place at MOE.

2.   MOE's Monitoring, Evaluation and Supervision Division and the Planning and Monitoring Division of the Department of Education (DOE) are responsible for the overall central M&E of school education. The education management information system (EMIS) at DOE is the main database related to schools, students, and teachers. It collects data from all schools twice a year—at the beginning of the academic year in May, and at the end of the academic year in March—and these are collated in the form of Flash I and Flash II reports and in annual consolidated reports. The data and reports generated are used for annual and trimester progress reports on school education.[3] Within schools, school management committees and head teachers are responsible for preparing a school-level EMIS report and submitting it to their respective resource center, and for conducting annual financial and social audits.[4] The resource centers collect and report school-level EMIS data and social audits to the district education offices (DEOs), which further compile the district data and submit them to DOE.[5] They also send the trimester physical and financial reports to DOE for further consolidation and subsequent reporting to MOE, the National Planning Commission, and development partners. The Education Review Office was established to undertake periodic national learning assessments and conduct performance audits of the MOE system.

3.   MOE has implemented a series of national programs in school education since the 1990s. The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) was implemented during FY2010–FY2016 and was completed in July 2016. The SSRP was jointly supported by development partners using a sector-wide approach, and the Joint Financing Arrangement (JFA) signed between the government and development partners prescribed the requirement for the M&E. The Flash I and II reports along with the annual status report and financial management reports were the key documents to provide data on progress and performance of the SSRP. This cycle of annual reports will be continued for the Supporting School Sector Development Plan, the results-based lending (RBL) program of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other joint financing partners

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[1] Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission. 2013. *National Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines*. Kathmandu.

[2] Government of Nepal follows a trimester cycle, which starts from 15 July of each year and the financial and program related monitoring is done accordingly.
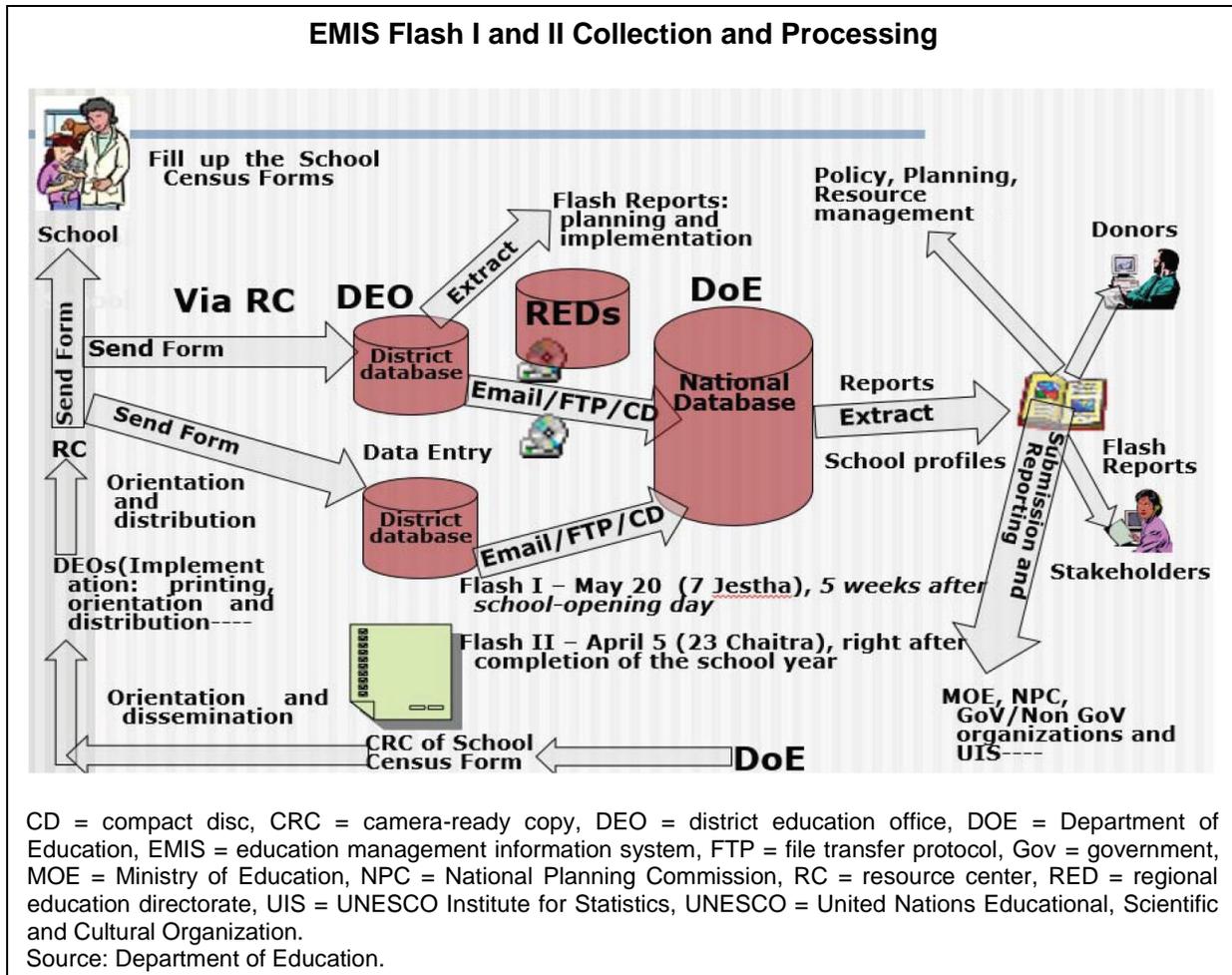
[3] The Flash I report is an assessment of the educational inputs and processes based on the school census data at the beginning of the school year. The data collection starts in May and compilation ends in July. The Flash II report focuses on the assessment of the educational outputs and outcomes based on data at the end of the school year. The data is collected in April and completed in June. The consolidated report analyses trends on key indicators over a number of years based on data from Flash I and II reports.

[4] Resource centers are centrally located secondary schools (grades 1−10 or 1−12) that provide professional and administrative support to a cluster of around 34 satellite schools. Nepal has 1,053 resource centers.

[5] Each resource center is staffed by a full-time resource person who is seconded from a teaching position.

(JFPs) in support of the government's School Sector Development Plan (SSDP). Additional analytical reports, such as a sector performance report, are also foreseen.

4.   The following figure details the process of data collection and reporting through EMIS.

EMIS Flash I and II Collection and Processing

CD = compact disc, CRC = camera-ready copy, DEO = district education office, DOE = Department of Education, EMIS = education management information system, FTP = file transfer protocol, Gov = government, MOE = Ministry of Education, NPC = National Planning Commission, RC = resource center, RED = regional education directorate, UIS = UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
Source: Department of Education.

5.   For the program in support of the SSDP, considerable upgrades to the M&E system and processes are foreseen to effectively support the RBL modality. Key SSRP instruments will be continued and additional mechanisms developed. The program entails financial management reports by DOE each trimester, and annual external audits of financial statements by the Office of the Auditor General. To improve financial management and manage fiduciary risk, a joint financial management action plan was agreed between the JFPs and the government and will be closely monitored. This includes an annual fiduciary review to diagnose bottlenecks and provide support to mitigating risks and ensuring timely action to reduce weaknesses. The program will have a common results framework and disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs). To verify the achievement of the DLIs, a rigorous verification protocol, including independent, third-party verification, is in place. Midterm and joint evaluations of SSDP activities are planned with the help of external technical assistance mobilized by the JFPs.

6.   The experience from the SSRP indicates that M&E can be improved by ensuring (i) sufficient qualified human resources at all levels, from the central government to the school;

(ii) timely reporting based on accurate data; and (iii) a dedicated program management team at MOE and DOE. These measures have been incorporated into the SSDP.

7.   A new JFA will be the main document guiding development partner financing for the SSDP and includes a strong emphasis on M&E to meet the needs of the RBL modality. The amounts to be disbursed are contingent on achievement of the DLIs. The JFPs and the government agreed on a single results framework and a single DLI framework to ensure a unified approach and a focus on achieving results.

8.   MOE and the JFPs will undertake semiannual reviews or consultations in March and November of each year to review progress in SSDP implementation (including the achievement of DLIs) in accordance with the JFA schedule for reporting and review. The joint review meeting in November each year will assess overall program performance and implementation progress based on the reports submitted, and confirm the achievement of annual DLI targets based on evidence submitted. The JFA also outlines the timing and process for undertaking the midterm review and evaluation of the SSDP.

B.   Assessment of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

9.   The SSDP has incorporated lessons from the SSRP to improve the overall M&E system and ensure the generation of reliable, timely, and adequate information on results, including DLIs. The program envisages the following critical reforms and actions to achieve this.

(i)   **System strengthening**. The SSDP aims to strengthen EMIS by expanding its use and availability to improve planning, implementation, and review at all levels. Key activities include operationalizing a web-based EMIS for capturing real-time data on schools, students, and teachers by DEOs, refinement of data collection forms and processes to align with the program results and indicators, and additional analytical reports and profile cards for schools and districts.[6] EMIS will undergo two rounds of third-party verification to increase the accuracy of data.

(ii)   **Improvement in sector performance analysis**. Given the large investment of time and resources in collecting data through Flash I and II, the data will be used for in-depth analysis to prepare sector performance reports. DOE is currently unable to do this because of human resource limitations in the EMIS unit. The SSDP plans to boost the capacity of the EMIS unit within DOE so that high-quality sector performance reports can be generated.

(iii)   **Stronger feedback mechanism to schools.** The school profile cards using the Flash I and II information are prepared by DOE. However, these cards are rarely disseminated to schools and rarely used by DOE and DEOs to provide feedback and needs-based support to the schools. The SSDP intends to refine the school profile cards into more performance-based cards to be used in conducting school social audits. This will be done to improve the accountability of schools as well as the engagement of stakeholders in the schools' overall performance.

(iv)   **Independent verification of DLI achievements.** The SSDP marks a new beginning by using a single DLI framework for all JFPs supporting the program.

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[6] DOE has already started the process of data entry by the schools rather than by the resource center. Computer upgrades are being done as well. As illustrated in the figure above, data entry has been all off-line.

The program envisages independent, third-party verification of the achievement of yearly DLI targets, which will increase assurance on results and progress.

(v) **Fiduciary and financial improvements.** The web-based computerized government accounting system developed by the Financial Comptroller General's Office will be rolled out in all 75 DEOs to strengthen districts' account keeping and ensuring timely preparation of the financial reports. The SSDP will revise the school grant financing formula to also include provision of needs- and performance-based block grants, which will ensure school-specific transparency and timely reporting of financial and physical progress.

(vi) **Effective program management.** A program steering committee and a program coordination secretariat at MOE will monitor SSDP progress as well as the DLIs. To fill capacity gaps in program management and technical support, an overall framework for technical assistance is being developed. It is expected that financing from the government and JFPs will be coordinated and guided accordingly. The Planning and Monitoring Division of DOE will be responsible for day-to-day implementation of the SSDP, and program implementation will be further strengthened by setting up a technical working committee at DOE. The DEOs will establish grant management units, and enough qualified accountants and engineering staff will be made available.

C. Managing Risks and Improving Capacity

10. The major risk relating to M&E is the inability of DOE to generate timely and reliable data as required for DLI reporting. This is further exacerbated by the fragmentation of M&E activities within MOE and DOE, and limited human resources and technical capacity. Besides the SSDP's in-built program to support the upgrade of EMIS, ADB and the other JFPs will mobilize necessary technical assistance to strengthen the EMIS and related reporting. This is expected to further strengthen the M&E system under the SSDP. Necessary actions to mitigate the risks were incorporated in the Program Action Plan.