

TERMS OF REFERENCE

International Consultant – Conceptual Framework and the Roadmap for developing a School Readiness Assessment System

CONTRACT MODALITY	Individual Consultancy
DUTY STATION	Lao People's Democratic Republic Vientiane & Office Based (With Travel)
DURATION OF CONTRACT	5 Months

Purpose of Assignment

The purpose of the assignment is to provide technical support to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Lao PDR to develop a conceptual framework and roadmap for establishing a school readiness assessment system, drawing on MoES' existing School Readiness Competencies (SRC) targeting children aged 5 to under 6 years (one year before primary grade one entry).

The existing MoES' SCR sets standards on school readiness across five domains, namely 1) physical development, movement and hygiene; 2) cognition and learning; 3) language and communication; 4) emotional development; and 5) social development. SCR is an essential foundation for children aged 3 to 5 years before they enter primary school. Beyond expanding equitable access to early childhood education, the MoES also aims to ensure the quality of early childhood education (ECE) translates into children's school readiness outcomes. Whilst the CRS has been integrated into the MOES' ECE curriculum, teacher guides and training, etc., actual assessment on children's learning and developmental status against the CRS has not yet been undertaken to date, nor is a system to undertake such an assessment yet to be established.

As presented in the 10th Education Sector Development Plan (ESSDP) 2026-2030, MoES considers it as a priority to monitor and assess ECE-aged children's learning and development based on the CRS, to determine their level of progress against the competencies, and to identify which domains need further promotion or support. This information is essential for planning, setting priorities, providing targeted support, leading to improving the quality and effectiveness of early childhood education overall.

To date, monitoring and reporting on ECE by MoES has focused mainly on access data, such as the number of learners, enrolment rates and the number of educational institutions. However, it has not yet been able to explain ECE-aged children's learning and developmental status comprehensively and objectively. Data on children's school readiness, based on the SRC, will therefore enable the sector to see both ECE access (from the EMIS) and the quality (children's level of school readiness), for use in analyzing key issues and disparities, setting priorities, and planning support for improving the overall quality of ECE services more in an evidence-based manner.

With these backdrops, based on the request from MoES, this consultancy is to support MOES to develop a conceptual framework and an accompanying actionable road map, to guide the overall development and piloting of the school readiness assessment. Since the MOES first aims to focus on children aged 5 to under 6 years in all types of ECE settings (one year before primary school), the assessment will focus on and be based on the SCR for five-year-old.

Scope of Work

The purpose of this consultancy is to provide dedicated technical assistance to MoES to develop a clear Conceptual Framework and an accompanying Road Map that will guide the development of the school readiness assessment (aged 5 to under 6 years – one year before primary school)

Key responsibilities include: Phase 1: Situational Analysis and Conceptual Framework

Task 1: Inception and Desk Review

- Review existing national policies and legal frameworks: Analyze national strategies, laws, policies, action plans and M&E systems related to ECE, along with the MOES' SRC
- Analyze existing CRS or related M&E systems and tools: Review and map current M&E mechanisms (including how or how not CRS is used), data collection tools, EMIS (Education Management Information System), health management information systems, and periodic surveys (e.g., MICS, etc) for ECE-aged children, that track child learning and development outcomes.
- Conduct international and regional benchmarking: Review best practices, regional standards, and successful models of SCR assessment, from comparable countries to identify lessons learned and innovative approaches.

Task 2: Stakeholder Engagement

- Conduct Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and FGDs: Engage with relevant departments within MoES and other concerned line Ministries and institutions, development partners, both national and sub-national levels.

Task 3: Conceptual Framework

- Based on the Phase 1 and 2, prepare rapid situation analysis, mapping of existing school readiness assessment activities, including its mechanisms, modalities, themes/contents, indicators and other related M&E work taking place by MoES, relevant line Ministries and various DPs, including the exiting technical and operational capacity and identifying gaps. This will also come with key recommendations drawn from the analysis and the mapping.
- Based on the above set of analysis and key recommendations, support prepare and finalize of a conceptual framework to design a locally relevant, sustainable school readiness assessment system for aged 5 up to under age 6, with a clear purpose and scope.

Phase 2: Roadmap Development

Task 1: Roadmap development, based on the Phase 1 results

- To develop a clear Road Map that will guide the establishment of a school readiness assessment system for age 5 (aged 5 to under age 6). The Road Map be developed based on the above situation analysis and the stemming recommendations, presented systematically in the form of a conceptual framework (under Phase 1). Besides, the Roadmap will be developed along with consultations with line departments of MOES, relevant line Ministries and institutions, development partners and other key stakeholders.
- The Roadmap will present a phased approach, covering:
 - Key activities and clear implementation steps, including multi-year key actions with timelines and estimated (rough) costs
 - Roles and responsibilities, governance mechanism
 - Capacity requirements

Work Assignments Overview	Deliverables/Outputs	Delivery deadline to complete the deliverable
Situation Analysis	Deliverable 1 Situational Analysis and Conceptual Framework, that will include: Task 1: Inception and Desk Review • Review existing national policies and legal frameworks: Analyze national strategies, laws, policies, action plans and M&E systems related to ECE, along with the MOES' SRC • Analyze existing CRS or related M&E systems and tools: Review and map current M&E mechanisms (including how or how not CRS is used), data collection tools, EMIS (Education Management Information System), health management information systems, and periodic surveys (e.g., MICS, etc) for ECEaged children, that track child learning and development outcomes • Conduct international and regional benchmarking: Review best practices, regional standards, and successful models of SCR assessment, from comparable countries to identify lessons learned and innovative approaches. Task 2: Stakeholder Engagement • Conduct Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and FGDs: Engage with relevant	22 January 2027

	departments within MoES and other concerned line Ministries and institutions, development partners, both national and sub-national levels. Task 3: Conceptual Framework • Based on the Phase 1 and 2, prepare rapid situation analysis, mapping of existing school readiness assessment activities, including its mechanisms, modalities, themes/contents, indicators and other related M&E work taking place by MoES, relevant line Ministries and various DPs, including the exiting technical and operational capacity and identifying gaps. This will also come with key recommendations drawn from the analysis and the mapping • Based on the above set of analysis and key recommendations, support prepare and finalize of a conceptual framework to design a locally relevant, sustainable school readiness assessment system for aged 5 up to under age 6, with a clear purpose and scope	
Road Map	Deliverable 2 Roadmap Development Task 1: Roadmap development, based on the Phase 1 results	12 March 2027

	• To develop a clear Road Map that will guide the establishment of a school readiness assessment system for age 5 (aged 5 to under age 6). The Road Map be developed based on the above situation analysis and the stemming recommendations, presented systematically in the form of a conceptual framework (under Phase 1). Besides, the Roadmap will be developed along with consultations with line departments of MOES, relevant line Ministries and institutions, development partners and other key stakeholders. • The Roadmap will present a phased approach, covering: - o Key activities and clear implementation steps, including multi-year key actions with timelines and estimated (rough) costs - o Roles and responsibilities, governance mechanism - o Capacity requirement	
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Payment Schedule:

Payment will be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables. UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment in case the deliverables submitted are not up to the required standard or in case of delays in submitting the deliverables on the part of the consultant.

Important Notes

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- Contracts are conditional upon the selected candidate's willingness to comply with any current or future vaccination requirements that may be established by UNICEF, where applicable. Failure to comply with applicable vaccination requirements, where required and without an approved medical exemption by UNICEF, may result in the withdrawal of the consultancy offer or termination of the contract in accordance with the General Terms and Conditions of Contract.
- UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS / SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCIES (CORE/TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL) / LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Minimum requirements:

Education Master’s (Advanced) degree in early childhood education, child development, education, education assessment, or another relevant field. In lieu of a specific academic degree, relevant experience may be considered to meet this requirement

Work Experience: At least 8 years of professional work experience in any relevant field including relevant academic disciplines to include any of these: early childhood development, early childhood education or educational measurement and assessment. Experience in the education sector in Laos/Southeast Asia is a strong asset.

Skills: Knowledge and experience in developing ECE or child development assessment, assessment systems and implementation of roadmaps. Knowledge of the Lao PDR’s education sector landscape and Lao PDR’s policies, strategies, guidelines related to ECE is a strong asset.

Language Requirements: Fluency in English is a requirement. Knowledge of Lao language or Thai language is a strong asset.

Desirables Prior work experience with UNICEF or other UN and/or international organization is an asset
