

**AIDE MEMOIRE
OF
THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK**

Loan 3435/Grant 0500-LAO: Second Strengthening Higher Education Project

**Review Mission
4 – 9 November 2018**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A review mission (the Mission)¹ from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was fielded from 4–9 November 2018 to assess the overall implementation the Second Strengthening Higher Education Project (the Project). The Mission discussed project progress and challenges with officials from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Savannakhet University, Champasack University, National University of Laos (NUOL) and Souphanouvong University. The teams jointly agreed on recommendations to improve and accelerate implementation. The Mission also visited Savannakhet to obtain first-hand information on the progress to establish a new university campus. A wrap-up meeting was held on 9 November 2018. This Aid Memoire summarizes the major issues discussed and understandings reached between the Mission and the Government. A list of the mission’s principal contacts is in **Appendix 1**. The Aid Memoire is subject to approval of higher authorities of the Government and ADB.

II. BACKGROUND

2. The Project was approved on 20 September 2016, declared effective on 6 January 2017, and is scheduled to close on 30 June 2022. The project has a total estimated cost of \$45.67 million, of which ADB will finance 87.4% through a loan for \$16.45 million and a grant for \$23.47 million. About \$20.9 million of the loan and grant proceeds are earmarked for civil works – of which more than 90% are reserved to establish a new campus at the Savannakhet University.

3. The intended impact of the project is to establish stronger links between education services and socioeconomic needs. The indented outcome of the project is improved quality of higher education services. The project provides support to four public universities: Champasack University, National University of Laos (NUOL), Savannakhet University, and Souphanouvong University, and intends to improve the regulatory framework for higher education institutions (HEIs).

4. Key indicators include: (i) number of DHE and university staff with postgraduate degrees increases to 1,550 by 2022 (from 1,355 in 2015); (ii) number of peer-reviewed research articles originating annually from the four universities supported by the project increases to 100 in 2022 (from 83 in 2014); (iii) 12 MOUs signed by MOES and HEIs to provide extension and consultancy services by 2022; (iv) number of university enrollments increases to 45,000 by 2022 (from 38,520 in 2015)

5. The Project includes three outputs: (i) Quality and relevance of higher education services in teaching, research, and extension is enhanced; (ii) Access to modern higher

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education programs introduced; (iii) Governance and management of higher education institutions strengthened.

III. MISSION FINDINGS

6. **Status of Implementation.** As of 31 October 2018, with the project's elapsed time of 36.3%, disbursements stood at \$1.01 million (4% of the total loan and grant allocation); \$3.99 million have been contracted (17% of the total loan and grant allocation). Against cumulative contract awards and disbursements projections for 2018, the project is rated an actual problem, having achieved only 18.69% and 15.8% of projections, respectively. Due to the delayed mobilization of the consultant team, who should support the MOES in the project implementation many activities started with a delay. The project team started their work only in June 2017, while the consulting firm (TTT) started in October 2018. An overview of the team is in Annex 2. All other implementation arrangements at MOES and at the participating universities are in place. MOES and universities have established project managements units with professional and highly motivated staff, who are ready to work together with the consultant team.

7. **Output 1: Quality and relevance of higher education services in teaching, research, and extension is enhanced.** Under Output 1 the project is expected to (i) establish centers of excellence (COEs) in participating universities; (ii) develop curricula for blended learning in line with the Lao PDR's national qualifications framework and with labor market demand; (iii) help strengthen capacities for research and delivery of extension services by (a) establishing competitive research grants, (b) upgrading research laboratories, and (c) providing capacity-building programs; (iv) provide postgraduate scholarships at NUOL or foreign partner universities to selected faculty and staff members; (v) establish mechanisms for providing continuing faculty and staff development programs; (vi) help create or strengthen existing international university partnerships and networks for upgrading local programs and services; (vii) develop university information technology infrastructure systems; and (viii) support employment skills development through the creation of an innovation fund for extracurricular activities.

8. **(i) Establish centers of excellence (COEs) in participating universities.** Based on the original project concept, the consultant team will develop a strategy to establish COEs at Champasack University (with the focus on agronomy); NUOL (with the focus on environmental science research); Souphanouvong University (with focus on tourism management); and Savannakhet University (with focus on logistics engineering). COEs should become the leading focal points for applied research in the thematic areas and foster collaboration with the private sector (companies and communities). To establish advanced research facilities, the project will finance construction of new buildings and procurement of research equipment. The bidding evaluation for construction of a small research facility for NUOL for \$200,000 is ongoing. The bid evaluation report for construction of new research facility at Champasack University for \$222,000 has been submitted to ADB for approval. Civil works for both universities will start in Q1 2019.

9. **(ii) Develop curricula for blended learning.** The consultant team has submitted a work plan for developing new curricula for blended learning in (i) environmental science, (ii) agronomy, (iii) tourism management, (iv) logistic engineering. Blended learning will combine information technology-based learning with face-to-face learning. As agreed in an earlier review mission the work plan also include the development of a stand-alone curriculum for foster entrepreneurial capacities of students. Furthermore, the work plan includes the preparation of learning and teaching materials. Considering the delayed start-up of the project and the limited time before completion the Mission suggested that MOES and the consultant team will review

the time frame for the proposed activities to ensure that all the new curricula can be introduced at the participating universities before project closure. It was agreed that a revised work plan for the development of the four curricula will be endorsed by MOES on 30 November 2018. DHE suggested developing national curricula standards which will be developed by DHE staff. The project will allocate budget to support this activity and includes in the annual plan 2019.

10. **(iii) Strengthen capacities for research and delivery of extension services by (a) establishing competitive research grants, (b) upgrading research laboratories, and (c) providing capacity-building programs.** \$1.3 million have been earmarked for research grants. Grants shall be utilized by university lecturers and researchers. The project team estimates that about 50 research projects can be implemented over the project duration. The funding for each project will be in the range of \$4,800 to \$28,000. To ensure a smooth implementation of research projects and subsequent disbursement of funds, the consultant team and DHE will (i) prepare an implementation instruction including steps to select research proposals which is aligned with instruction from Ministry of Science and Technology (ii) establish clear review and approval procedures to evaluate and endorse research proposals; (iii) establish a research task team at each university to review and endorse research reports, including term of reference and qualification of the task team; (iv) prepare a disbursement procedures of funds to research applicants with consultation with DOF and submit to MOF for approval. To ensure efficient disbursement of research grants, the Mission advised to engage MOF as early as possible to agree on disbursement procedures. It was agreed that a full proposal with practical procedures to operate research grants will be submitted to MOF for discussion by 31 January 2019.

11. Upgrading of research laboratories under this project has not yet started, which could delay the implementation of research projects. The Mission recommended looking for partnership opportunities among Lao universities and consider collaboration with regional universities.

12. **(iv) provide postgraduate scholarships at NUOL or foreign partner universities to selected faculty and staff members.** \$2.5 million have been earmarked for master degree and doctoral matching scholarship programs for 115 university faculty staff. The selection process of candidates is ongoing. Each university will coordinate and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOUs) with foreign universities. The project has developed a sample Memorandum of Agreement template for matching scholarships which includes all implementation matters to improve conditions for students to study abroad, i.e waving of fees, free accommodation etc. The template and implementation arrangement documents were approved by ADB. Based on the memo MOES and individual universities have approached some international universities to establish partnerships and increase scholarship opportunities for their students. DHE and the consultant team should conduct a one-day workshop to clarify the implementation arrangements prior signing agreements with foreign universities and provide information on how to monitor the performance of scholarship recipients. To ensure that all scholarship programs can be completed before project closure, the Mission suggested engaging with MOF to agree on disbursement procedures and payment schedules. It was agreed that a detailed scholarship time table and disbursement plan shall be prepared by 31 November 2018, which will be updated quarterly. DHE is recruiting a scholarship coordinator to monitor performance of the scholarship recipients Progress will be documented in the project quarterly progress reports. Universities will assign a focal staff to work with scholarship coordinator by January 2019. MOES will brief ADB about content of the discussion with MOF before 15 December 2018.

13. Selection is ongoing in CU, NUOL, and SKU. Four female staff from the Department of Planning and Department of Finance will receive the scholarship. Due to absence of qualified applicants within MOES, 1 matching scholarship recipient was given to SKU. Souphanouvong University also completed its selection: 12 recipients (7 female): comprising 2 international PhD (1 female); 3 international master degrees (2 female); and 7 in-country masters (4 female). All

the selected recipients must sign the contract with the project prior process all the logistic arrangements.

14. **(v) Establish mechanisms for providing continuing faculty and staff development programs.** Visiting scholars are proposed to undertake this task. It was agreed that the consultant team will prepare a concept paper with suggestions how to use visiting scholars. Each visiting scholar should have clear TOR that should be endorsed by MOES. The concept paper will be submitted for review and approval to MOES by 31 January 2019.

15. **(vi) Create or strengthen existing international university partnerships and networks for upgrading local programs and services.** Since the consultant team was mobilized only in October 2018, no activity has been conducted yet.

16. **(vii) Develop university information technology infrastructure systems.** Internet connections at all participating universities have been upgraded. IT facility at Savannakhet University will take place at a later stage when civil works are completed.

17. **(viii) support employment skills development through the creation of an innovation fund for extracurricular activities.** \$95,000 is earmarked to support extracurricular activities. The consultant team is currently preparing a concept to utilize the funds by engaging with private and public companies and communities. It was agreed that the concept paper will be submitted to MOES for review and approval by 31 January 2019. DHE will seek advice and concurrence from MOF to use the Project fund to support this innovative scheme.

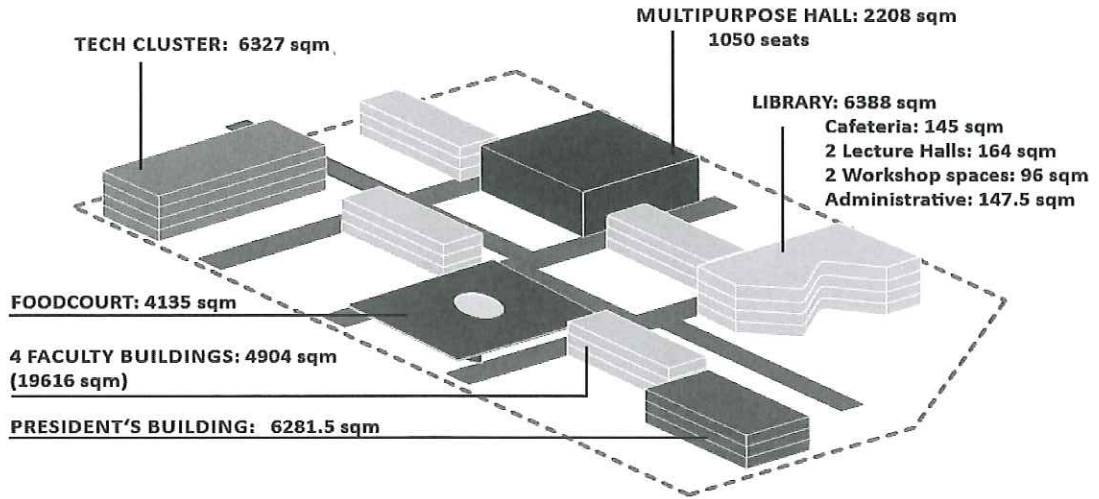
18. **Output 2: Access to modern higher education programs introduced.** Under the second output the project will establish a modern campus at Savannakhet University following international standards, with an initial capacity of 3,960 students and a design to later accommodate 6,140 students by 2030. The new campus will include laboratories, equipment, furniture, dormitories, and student facilities. The project will also strengthen systems for student selection and admissions applicable at the university level.

19. An Architecture design firm (C+A with MSA) has been contracted to help Savannakhet University in preparing the detailed technical design of the new campus. C+A with MSA has been mobilized in March 2018. The original contract was extended to March 2019 (contract value \$960,000). Savannakhet University presented the proposed design as shown in Figure 1. The Mission appreciated the proposal, but noted that the proposed investment cost to construct the new campus are above the available funds that have been earmarked for civil works for Savannakhet University. The Mission advised that about \$19.0 million from the Project funds would be available for civil works to establish the new campus.

Figure 1 : Proposed design for the new campus at Savannakhet University

SKU PHASING SCHEME

CURRENT DESIGN (FOR 3960 STUDENTS):



20. MOES and the senior management of Savannakhet University proposed the following size and investment costs for the above shown buildings:

Building	Floor area (m2)	Average estimated cost (\$/m2)	Estimated Total Cost
President Building & administration	4,456	551	2,456,808
Library	6,389	526	3,363,051
Technical buildings (labs & ICT)	6,227	563	3,506,489
Food court and commercial center	1,869	493	921,136
Auditorium/multipurpose hall	2,208	554	1,222,632
Faculty of Food Science	3,875	486	1,882,471
Faculty of Science	3,875	486	1,882,471
Faculty of Engineering	3,875	486	1,882,471
Faculty of Linguistic	3,875	486	1,882,471
TOTAL			19,000,000

21. The Mission advised that the design and or investment costs need to be revised in order to include installation of water and electricity supply, waste water system, air conditioning and basic infrastructure at the new campus. It was agreed that by 15 December 2018, the C+A with MSA team, DHE and the Savannakhet University team will revise the proposal and submit a revised initial design and investment plan to MOES. The revised proposal will consider costs for buildings and necessary infrastructure within the given budget of \$19.0 million. The Mission would appreciate if communication between Savannakhet team and MOES and local architecture team would be strengthened to accelerate the finalization of the design.

22. Furthermore, it was agreed that by 31 March 2019, the C+A with MSA team will provide the final detailed design for buildings and the necessary infrastructure and the draft environmental implementation plan. The information should be sufficient to prepare comprehensive technical tender documents including technical drawings, technical specifications, bill of quantity and detailed cost estimates. The full set of documents will be submitted to MOES for review and approval. The final design and investment proposal will be endorsed by the Minister of Education by 30 April 2019. At present, the Mission has no objection to the proposed unit costs per m² as long as the suggested rates will ensure the utilization of quality materials to establish functional and safe buildings.

23. Draft bidding documents, with technical drawing, detailed specifications, bill of quantity, cost estimates, and the draft environment implementation plan will be submitted to ADB for review and endorsement by 31 March 2019.

24. The environment implementation plan should be submitted to ADB for review in February 2019 and approved by MONRE in March 2019.

25. MOES with the help of the PIU procurement officer will complete the bidding documents and arrange for advertisement by 30 May 2019.

26. C+A with MSA requested the MOES to expedite the outstanding payments to the firm. Furthermore C+A with MSA requested that the approval time of future reports should be as

follow: 3 days for memos and 7 days for report after workshop. C+A with MSA reminded MOES that Interim Report no. 1 and external memos have not been approved. C+A with MSA requested that all changes from original design proposed by SKU must have approval from MOES.

27. The project also provides \$3.625 million for equipment and vehicles. The mission informed that \$0.48 million has been disbursed for vehicles. Furthermore \$1.3 million is earmarked for equipment for NUOL; \$0.47 million is allocated for equipment for Center of Excellences CU; and \$0.2 million is allocated for equipment for DHE, QAC, SKU and LIEDC. Thus only about \$1.2 million is left for training and research equipment for the new campus at Savannakhet University. The Mission suggested that DHE and participating universities shall re-discuss the allocation of funds for equipment. The mission further advised that equipment requirements need to be justified. The PIU and consultant should provide a plan for using of new equipment in new or ongoing academic programs or research projects, and sufficient funds for operation and maintenance once the project funds is reallocated.

28. Output 3: Governance and management of higher education institutions strengthened. Under the third output the project will support (i) staff development of participating university managers and administrators; (ii) international visiting scholar programs to the Lao PDR as part of the continuing professional development for university officials; (iii) review of the regulatory and financing framework for HEIs; (iv) tracer studies and employer surveys, including assessment of higher education sector performance; (v) upgrade of the higher education management information system; (vi) implementation of the government's national human resource development strategy, 2016–2025; and (vii) further strengthening of quality assurance for HEIs.

29. **(i) staff development of participating university managers and administrators.** The consultant team intended to develop training modules for university managers and administrators to improve their leadership and managerial skills and knowledge and strengthen internal procedures and long-term planning as indicated in their TOR. The consultant team further suggested that they will conduct these training programs. The Mission suggested to rethink this approach. To provide practical advice based on actual experience in managing universities it might be better to engage specialized firms and/or international universities who could develop and conduct tailor made training programs based on needs assessments. It was agreed that MOES and the consultant team will update the staff development plan to strengthen university managers, faculty staff and administrators and submit a revised plan to ADB by 31 January 2019.

30. **(ii) international visiting scholar programs to the Lao PDR as part of the continuing professional development for university officials.** The project provides funds for payment of visiting scholars. It was agreed that the consultant team will prepare a concept on how to utilize visiting scholars most effectively to improve the overall performance of the HE system in Laos. The consultant team will submit a concept paper by 31 January to DHE for review and approval. The mission advised the project implementation consultants to discuss further with DHE and the universities on the recruitment of international visiting scholars. Based on findings of SHEP 1, there is a need to review the terms of reference to maximize these experts' services to correctly correspond to the universities' needs. Recruitment of visiting scholars is subject to discussion between the project implementation firm and MOES. The mission recommended that the TOR be revisited to maximize the impact of recruitments. A decision will be communicated to ADB by 31 December 2018.

31. **(iii) review of the regulatory and financing framework for HEIs.** Due to the delayed mobilization of the consultant team activities have not yet started.

32. **(iv) tracer studies and employer surveys, including assessment of higher education sector performance.** Instead of conducting tracer studies by the consultant team or local consulting firm, it was agreed that the consultant team will help universities to set up systems to regularly collect tracer information of graduates regularly. The consultant team will also provide guidance on how to use tracer information to improve existing education and research programs and plan new academic courses and research agendas. Activities will start in Q1 2019.

33. **(v) upgrade of the higher education management information system.** Under the previous project a Lao University Management System (LUMS) has been established. \$130,000 has been earmarked under the current project to further develop and enhance LUMS. Assessment works will start in November 2018. Based on the assessment results, the LUMS upgrade is scheduled for 2019.

34. **(vi) implementation of the government's national human resource development strategy, 2016–2025.** The national HRD strategy and action plan was developed under a TA financed by ADB. The project will finance the dissemination of the action plan and trainings. Two proposals on workshops to (i) adopt the revised national curriculum standards; and (ii) to revise and adopt regulation on issuance of higher education certificates are pending ADB's approval.

35. **(vii) further strengthening of quality assurance for HEIs.** The project will support the QAC to assess the current quality assurance system compared with ASEAN quality assurance system. The project will recruit 2-3 resource persons/visiting scholars to deliver this task. QAC will draft the terms of reference and prepare cost estimates, and coordinate with PIU to determine which budget to use. Proposals for workshops will be included in the 2019 workplan.

B. Project Management Review

a. Financial Management.

36. **Submission of audited project financial statement (APFS) reports.** The first APFS report was submitted to ADB well before the submission deadline of 30 Jun 2018, with auditor's unqualified opinion. The audit report, which was prepared by the State Audit Organization in coordination with the D-PIU finance unit and Department of Finance of the MOES, covered the period January - December 2017.

37. **Disbursement cut-off.** ADB requires withdrawal applications to be submitted by 7 December 2018. All other claims submitted after the cut-off period will be settled by Q1 2019.

38. **Status of Advance Account.** The advance account was opened in May 2017 for an initial advance of \$0.800 million. To date, only 4 withdrawal applications (WA 0001-0004) have been submitted and replenished by ADB. Before the disbursement cut-off in December, D-PIU will submit WAs 0005 (replenishment) and 0006 (direct payment to vehicle supplier), estimated at \$0.571 million in November 2018.

39. **Counterpart funding.** Under the project, taxes and duties will comprise government counterpart funding. The mission sought MOES Minister's assistance in coordination with the Ministry of Finance (MOF), to secure counterpart funding for 2019. The Department of Planning of MOES will work closely with the project team and MOF to continually address this issue. PIU will update ADB on the progress of this issue by 30 November 2018.

40. **Remaining contract awards and disbursements for 2018.** By end 2018, additional \$0.790 million will be awarded for (i) Champasak University COE civil works; (ii) recruitment of visiting scholars; and (iii) in-country scholarships. For disbursements, MOES expects additional \$0.571 million. These projections, when delivered as scheduled, will bring about 22% achievement of contract awards and 25% of disbursements by end 2018.

41. **Contract awards and disbursement projections for 2019.** Based on discussions with DHE and the project university managements, PIU aims to award 19 contracts, estimated at \$29.47 million in 2019, including civil works at Savannakhet University. By end Q4 2019, with the award of these 19 contracts and disbursement of about \$6.23 million, the Mission estimates that project will graduate to a potential problem status if all procurement plans (including the civil works in Savannakhet University) will be delivered as scheduled and if counterpart funding will be timely provided.

42. The following packages are expected to be awarded in 2019.

Table 1: Packages to be awarded in 2019

No.	Details of Procurement	Contract Amount (USD million)	Procurement Method
1.	SKU civil work	19.00	ICB
2.	NUOL Center of Excellence	0.200	NCB
3.	Equipment for NUOL Center of Excellence	1.30	ICB
4.	Equipment for DHE, QAC, SKU COE, and LIETC	0.30	NCB
5.	Consulting services for SKU construction supervision	0.540	QCBS
6.	Training	0.018	-
7.	Curriculum development	0.100	-
8.	Teacher training and professional development	0.026	-
9.	Scholarships	2.230	-
10.	Courses in moodle for academic staff	0.06	-
11.	Innovation fund (IFECA)	0.030	-
12.	Competitive fund for research grants	0.250	-
13.	Capacity development for university administrators	0.040	-
14.	3 in-country training and 5 overseas training for HE senior management	0.050	-
15.	Policy studies on quality, performance, efficiency and effectiveness in HE	0.028	-
16.	Employment surveys and tracer studies	0.014	-
17.	Capacity building and support for research and networking	0.057	-
18.	LUMS software development and upgrading	0.130	-
19.	Visiting scholars	0.132	ICS

b. Consulting Services

43. **SKU Design Firm (CSF2).** Coelacanth and Associates have been recruited to assist Savannakhet University in the design of the new campus. The firm was mobilized in May 2018. ADB also approved an extension for the contract completion date to 31 March 2019. The detailed design is estimated to be approved by MOES in Q1 2019 and bidding documents to be issued by latest in Q2 2019.

44. **Project Implementation Consultants (CSF1).** Training and Technology Transfer (TTT) was engaged to provide capacity building and project implementation services and was mobilized in October 2018. To date, both international and national consultants are on board. The mission was also advised about the potential replacement of the international team leader due to health issues. A request to replace the team leader and recommendation for the replacement team leader will be submitted to ADB by December 2018. The mission noted that the national deputy team leader provides good professional support.

c. Procurement

45. **Project vehicles (G2, G8).** Procurement of vehicles was completed although payment is still being processed after receiving tax waiver. WA 0006 covers full payment to the supplier via direct payment and will be submitted to ADB before 30 November 2018.

46. **Construction of NUOL and CU Center for Excellence (COE) (CW2 and CW3).** Review of CU COE bid evaluation report is pending ADB's approval, which is expected to be secured by 7 November 2018. Bid opening for NUOL COE was concluded last week; bid evaluation report is expected to be submitted to ADB by 15 December 2018.

47. The Mission detected some inconsistencies related to civil works in the PAM. While the cost tables show \$20.915 million for civil works, the procurement plan indicates \$23.655 million for civil works for SKU. Since the cost category of civil works also includes furniture and civil works for other two universities – only \$19 million is available for civil works at SKU. The Mission will advise ADB to revise the procurement plan accordingly and post the updated information on the ADB web side.

IV. PROJECT SPECIFIC ASSURANCE AND SAFEGUARDS ASPECTS

48. **Loan and Grant covenants.** Compliance with loan and grant covenants is attached as Appendix 3. The mission confirmed that most covenants are ongoing as a large project activities have not yet started.

49. **Safeguards.** As confirmed by LRM safeguards officer, an environmental code of conduct (ECoC) for small civil works in CU and NUOL is required and approved by ADB. A national environment safeguards officer has been recruited in October 2018 to address this requirement. The ECoC will be submitted to ADB on 31 December 2018. Prior to start of SKU construction, a semi-annual monitoring report will be required to be approved by ADB in accordance with conditions for award of civil works in Schedule 4 of the Loan/Grant Agreement.

50. **Gender.** The national gender and social development specialist under TTT will prepare a gender action plan (GAP) monitoring report for ADB approval. The mission advised the consultants shall coordinate with LRM's gender specialist for guidance.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

51. **Agreed time-bound actions.** MOES and the mission agreed on the following time-bound actions.

	Action	Target Date	Responsible Unit
1.	Submit revised action plan for development of the 4 curricula	30 Nov 2018	D-PIU
2.	Submit to MOF a full proposal with practical procedures for research grants implementation	31 Jan 2019	D-PIU
3.	Report to ADB about content of discussion with MOF on postgraduate scholarships' completion by project closing and payment/disbursement procedures/schedules	15 Dec 2018	D-PIU
4.	Submit concept paper to MOES on coordination with public and private companies on innovation fund	31 Jan 2019	D-PIU

	Action	Target Date	Responsible Unit
5.	Submit WAs before ADB's disbursement cutoff	6 Dec 2018	D-PIU
6.	Update ADB on progress of counterpart funding	15 Nov 2018	D-PIU
7.	Award remaining 2018 packages	15 Dec 2018	D-PIU
8.	Complete SKU detailed design	31 Mar 2019	D-PIU
9.	Issue bid documents for SKU civil works	30 May 2019	D-PIU
10.	Update ADB of decision on recruitment of international visiting scholars	15 Nov 2018	D-PIU
11.	Submit bid evaluation report for NUOL COE civil works	10 Dec 2018	D-PIU
12.	Submit ECoC for ADB approval	30 Nov 2018	D-PIU

52. **Next mission schedule.** Subject to approval of the government and ADB, next review mission will be in May 2019.

Vientiane, 9 November 2018

On Behalf of the Ministry of Education and Sports



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On Behalf of the Asian Development Bank



Wolfgang Kubitzki
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