

Third Technical Assistance Sub-Committee (TASC) Meeting

December 14, 2020

Meeting Minutes



1. Introduction:

The 3rd meeting of the Technical Assistance Sub-Committee (TASC) was held under the chair of Dr. Gopi Khanal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA)/National Programme Director (NPD), PLGSP on 14th December 2020. The meeting was participated by the Senior Officials of Ministries, representatives of the Joint Financing Agreement (JFA) partners, UNDP and PLGSP PCU. representative The National Programme Manager (NPM), Mr. Chiranjivi Timsina started the meeting by welcoming everyone in the room and those present virtually. The NPM mentioned that the TASC meeting will guide us in our days ahead and would also look at the progress of the project.

The NPD, Mr. Gopi Khanal, greeted everyone. He mentioned this was his first TASC meeting, adding he felt privileged to chair the Third TASC Meeting. He thanked all his predecessors who worked very hard to create a strong foundation and for recruiting the needed staff, mentioning that when he joined PLGSP, he felt lucky as most of the foundational work was completed and handed over to the PCGGs and to all provincial governments.

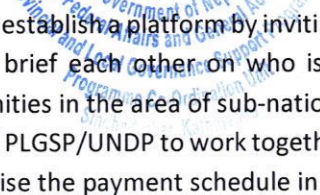
Further to this, he mentioned that the PLGSP started many initiatives such as drafting of the IPF guidelines, development of different ToRs, which were in the pipeline and were with the ministry for approval. He added that the programme has been fully owned by the government of Nepal and the local governments. He mentioned that the seven provincial governments and the 753 local governments were the implementing agencies of the PLGSP, and therefore, the PCU is planning to visit the provincial government and conduct some workshop and to frequently communicate with the Provincial Government (PG) as they are important factor for the implementation of the programme. He asked NPM to continue with the presentation.

Cynthia Rowe, Team Leader, Governance and Service Delivery Team, FCDO, greeted everyone in her opening remark and thanked for the opportunity. She mentioned that the development partners were particularly looking forward to reviewing the progress on the Technical Assistance (TA) including discussion on the role and scope of TA, priorities for the next period, discussing any policy issues or any governance issues and approving the TA workplan. She further appreciated very much the MoFAGA team, MoFAGA PCU team and UNDP for organizing the third TASC meeting and for sharing documents ahead of time.

The third TASC meeting decided the following action points. The note on the presentation and discussion is attached in the Annex-1. List of participants is given in Annex-2

2. Action points:

1. The TASC acknowledged the TA progress and decided to approve the programme and financial report of the period of June-December 2020 after addressing the inputs from the DPs which were addressed at the meeting and previously shared.
2. The TASC decided to endorse the revised TA AWP 2020.
3. The TASC decided to endorse the TA AWP for 2021 after addressing the inputs from the DPs which were addressed at the meeting and previously shared.

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4. The TASC advises PCU to establish a platform by inviting all DPs to continue with coordination meetings on a quarterly basis to brief each other on who is doing what and to discuss about the ongoing challenges and opportunities in the area of sub-national governance.
 5. The TASC also requested PLGSP/UNDP to work together in order to align the TA Annual Work Plan with the PLSP ASIP and to revise the payment schedule in line with the Joint Financial Agreement.

3. Closing remarks

Cynthia Rowe mentioned that it was a productive and instructive meeting for all participants. The meeting covered a lot of ground and there was a lot that was discussed. She mentioned if a series of informal working meetings could be organized to follow up on those points, if MoFAGA and Dr. Gopi Khanal sir consider as good way to go forward.

Gopi Khanal, NPD, mentioned that the meeting was good, and he was happy to chair it, noting that the feedback received was good and well noted. He further highlighted that they were making sure that all the work done by the TA should stay within the government and used even after the programme is completed. He updated that LISA was approved, and they would request the government to use LISA for local government monitoring. He noted that it was put on hold for 2 years, but they made a lot of effort to convince ministries, so they consider LISA as a major achievement of the programme. They are planning to organize orientation on LISA for local governments in order to obtain feedback from the provinces and the mayors and will ask the Ministry of Finance to include LISA in the monitoring system to become an integral part of the governance system. So far, they have received very good feedback on LISA from local governments already and they are happy for using it.

He thanked UNDP on the excellent support for the management of the TA. He mentioned that the IPF experts are on board, most of the staff were in place and orientation was conducted. They are planning to visit all PPIUs and discuss on the PLGSP. He added that module trainings will be developed as well.

He acknowledged that GESI was very important, and therefore he sent a proposal to the cabinet and key documents on GESI and asked LGs to work on it. He noted that GESI benefits lives of people so every ministry should be involved.

Regarding COVID-19, he mentioned that the min-term review will help and asked how we could adapt the PLGSP in accordance with the demands from COVID-19 crisis. He proposed to have meetings and to plan PLGSP adaptation.

He mentioned that PLGSP was a flagship programme and therefore overlapping and duplication should be avoided. They will extend support to PPIU and PGs and engage in broader consultation with politicians and provincial level and not only with bureaucrats. The PLGSP communication plan will be developed and they will work side by side with the DPs. The communication plan will reach to a broader audience and will introduce a systematic way of communicating.

He thanked all the participants for their feedback. He mentioned that it was normal to have a low progress during the first Quarter and that the second Quarter would have more progress. He informed that he had requested the secretary to have a meeting on the fiduciary risk, noting that the ministry was commitment to this.





Annex-1

4. Presentation:

Chiranjivi Timsina, the NPM, made a brief presentation on the progress of TA work plan of PLGSP. He highlighted the key progress made for the period of January-December 2020. Regarding the financial progress, he presented that the total budget for year 2020 as per the original plan was USD 2,765,372.16 against which the total expenditure in the period of January-November 2020 was USD 969,576.85 (35.06%). The presentation made by Mr. Timsina is attached separately.

He listed the agenda points and referred to the last TASC meeting decision and provided an update on the progress.

Agenda:

- Presentation, discussion and endorsement of the overall financial and programmatic progress, including updates on recruitment against the TA Annual Work Plan (AWP) of the current Fiscal Year (FY);
- Endorsement of the 2020 TA AWP to approve downward budget revision;
- Approval of the 2021 TA AWP considering the Annual Strategic Implementation Plan (ASIP) for FY 2020/21; and
- AoB

He asked the TASC to approve the TA progress report and the Annual Work Plan (AWP) and the financial report, he mentioned that the orientation training was already conducted for the TA staff and to the PGs, the vehicle purchase is ongoing, and IPF Operational Guidelines are being drafted. (please refer to the presentation for more details).

Regarding the slide on recruitment of the TA staff, the NPM requested Ms. Rina Chhetri of UNDP to elaborate. Ms. Rina explained the GESI affirmative action that UNDP enforced during the recruitments. She mentioned the UNDP's diversity policy, which was in place since 2007, was followed in various stages of the recruitment. She explained that the ToRs mentioned GESI, the advertisements were widely circulated, GESI questions and assessments were conducted and grace marks and points were provided for encouraging women and people from marginalized groups. She also talked about challenges of having a smaller number of applications for positions outside Kathmandu and for the technical positions respectively. She mentioned that some women candidates rejected and withdrew from the process for location reasons. She mentioned that quality was never compromised while bringing the right talent for the position.

5. Discussion:

The NPM opened the floor for discussion.

Madhu Bishwokarma, Governance Advisor, FCDO, enquired a detail regarding the LISA guideline approval and endorsement by the National Steering Committee as mentioned in the PLGSP project document.

Cynthia Rowe thanked for the presentation and mentioned that it was interesting and that a lot of information was there. She mentioned that it was good to see how much progress has been made on the recruitments and that it was a tough year but with only 13 percent to go we were in a good place. She mentioned that it was also good to see the efforts that were made around inclusion of all the monitoring that they were doing alongside that. One of the things that she was thinking about was that when they first set up the programme, they had a conversation with the Ministry of Finance (MoF), MoFAGA, and themselves on the proportion of the budget that was set aside for TA. MoF cut some of the budget in favour of the financial aid because that was a



philosophical view that MoF had. They are going to review it during the mid-term review. Before the mid-term review, she suggested to think about that, so that we could pre-empt what we would like out TA do. She mentioned it was important for her to know about quality of what they were doing, making sure they were not substituting for capacity which they know that it could be an easy problem and how we could really encourage the TA to facilitate the discussions between the three spheres of the government and the PLGs and how we could measure what they were doing by the results of what we get. For her, the measurement of how well the TA was doing was the quality of what the PLGs were producing. Therefore, she wondered if we could take that forward as a discussion to iron out and ahead of any reviews.

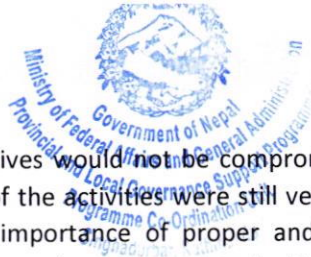
She further mentioned that she really liked the process of going through the outputs because she thought it kept them focused and as a reminder of the progress. She mentioned that we could think about how to those outputs are in line with the impact of COVID-19 crisis, mentioning that she would not like to see ourselves up to fail because we had not adjusted the milestones, suggesting that it would be a good conversation to have. Now that the project is up and running, focus can be put into measuring of the outcomes.

She mentioned that for her, training was a necessary input, but carrying out training on its own did not give us the result that we would want. She suggested to be thinking how we could measure the results of that. Also, she mentioned that it would be great to increase our focus on provincial and local government mobilization, mentioning that it was ironic there were no PLGs at this meeting. She further added that we were in a set up mode being centrally focused/ federal focus. However, now it is the time to push on mobilizing the demand from PLGs and get them involved in the consultations, in the participation of the design and similar, since they would be the ones implementing the Programme. She asked how we could use the information from the COVID-19 management information system (C-MIS) to help us flex the programme going forward. Finally, she mentioned that she would really like for us to spend more and to spend for impact and outcomes. She finished by saying that all DPs were really willing to help and pull their brain power and work together with MoFAGA and UNDP TA to try and solve the problems, so DPs are very happy to help and this was a great conversation, according to her.

Dagny Mjøs, Minister Counsellor/Head of Development Cooperation, Royal Norwegian Embassy, greeted everyone. She agreed with the points raised by Cynthia, adding that it would be very important that MoFAGA establishes a regular communication and follow up routine to ensure effective communication between and among the TA staff and the project management at PPIU and PCGG levels. She had seen in the progress report that PLGSP plan was yet to be finalized and she considered it important that information and decisions from the NEC and other key processes such a PCGG establishment or the IPF design were communicated to all the relevant stakeholders. She suggested the PCU and the TA to finalize the communication plan as soon as possible and start rolling it out, including using of the website, social media and similar.

On the revision of TA Annual Work Plan (AWP), the Third NEC approved the overall progress report from July 2019-July 2020, and they consider that the TA progress was included in the 2019 Annual Progress Report (ASIP) that was already approved. She mentioned that in order to improve the ability of the TASC to monitor the TA, they would be happy if MoFAGA and PLGSP could share the trimester reports with the TASC. Also, she asked MoFAGA if they could ensure that the TA plan included any update as part of the ASIP and the annual report of PLGSP. Finally, she said that they noted that the AWP for UNDP was for the calendar year 2021, and the importance that the AWP is in line with the ASIP. She mentioned that given that the ASIP for the next financial year would only be ready in June 2021, she asked how the TA AWP would be aligned with the PLGSP plan after its approval in June.

Shradha Rayamajhi, National Programme Officer, Swiss Embassy, SDC, had a couple of points on the coordination and the TA role. She mentioned that DPs recommended that there should be a specific provincial ASIP narrative with detailed activities as much as possible, so there would be less chance of vagueness and the



achievement of outcomes and objectives would not be compromised. She mentioned that from their own experience, they realized that some of the activities were still very vague, mentioning Province 1 ASIP as an example. She also stressed on the importance of proper and adequate consultation with all levels of government including political representatives, and not to be limited to government bureaucrats. She also emphasized that the lead for PLGSP activities at province level should come from the Provincial Coordination Committee. She also reiterated on coordination with other governance programs like it was the case in the past, such as the PSP in province 1 and PFM programs such as PFM FDTF. She also commented on the role of the TA staff to facilitate consultation between and among the PLGs, provide technical assistance to the best of their capacities and not to influence, as from her experience in working with Province 1. The lead should always come from the provincial government according to her. Further to this, she suggested that the communication with the provincial level should be more open and regular. She mentioned that they were trying to work closely with the TA team leader and with PDD and PPM of Province 1 along with PPD and PPM of Province 1. However, most of the communication came from their side, while the response from TA was rather slow, requesting improvement of the practice.

Chiranjivi advised to continue with the discussion later. He presented the TA Work Plan for 2021 and discussed about the revised work plan and the newly proposed activity for conducting Mid-Term Review. He also shared the budget of the revised plan. He opened the floor for further discussion.

Cynthia Rowe mentioned that the DPs had seen the TA Work Plan and there were some reconciliations to do and mentioned that they would share their feedback. UNDP proposed the budget for 2021 and that it would be good to hear from them at some point. Firstly, she said that they knew that the spending rate was slow this year partly because of COVID-19 crisis, so she commented if they could make sure that the forecast for 2021 was realistic bearing in mind the COVID-19 crisis and even though a vaccine might be coming, it would not be rolled out soon. Her question was if we were collectively happy that this spending represented what we could do. Regarding the governance of the programme, she mentioned that in accordance with the joint financial agreement (JFA), what they would like is MoFAGA and UNDP to revise the payment schedule for the TA payments. The JFA states that the funds from the foreign currency account will be advanced to the TA on a half yearly basis, subject to approval of programme results and financial progress reports by the National Steering Committee, while the agreement that we have at this moment, the advancements are made on an annual basis. On behalf of DPs she requested that work plans were aligned with the JFA and she would be happy to work out how and when that would happen, and it would be contained in DPs letter as well. Finally, she asked when the first audit by the Auditor General would be conducted, who would be looking at the disbursements of the TA fund and how the disbursements would be used.

Bernardo Cocco, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP, agreed with the DPs on the overall good progress while mentioning that some tweaking might be needed particularly at the provincial level. Referring to what Cynthia said on the budget, he reiterated that for UNDP it has been a slow year for good reasons. However, they have been able to keep up and manage and deliver a good progress with TA recruitments which was the main element of what UNDP was brought into to do. He mentioned that he did not foresee UNDP to utilize additional resources of another trench until June of 2021; therefore, UNDP would not be going to release the second trench until June 2021. On this note, he agreed with Cynthia's point that we should make all efforts to align both payment schedules to be on a half yearly basis. UNDP will take that advice and will discuss separately with the leadership and MoFAGA. UNDP would probably ask for a formal request from MoFAGA in order to modify the schedule of payment in the best interest of both.

Egbert Pos, Governance Advisor and Deputy Team Leader thanked for the presentation and asked the presentation to be shared. He asked about a follow-up on GESI guidelines and maintenance of roster since there were advertisements of rosters at the provincial level. Further to this, he mentioned that it was important



to ensure that there were proper safeguarding policies in place and that they are proactively implemented for all staff also for the PLGSP. He would like to be updated on that at this meeting.

Tek Tamata, Portfolio Manager, UNDP, mentioned that since the PLGSP started in December 2019, the audit was not conducted due to no expenditures. Regarding the alignment with Nepali fiscal year, it is possible to align with the government, and UNDP is discussing that. Roster management now goes to MoFAGA. He mentioned that they had a couple of discussion with PCU and NPM on the communication plan.

Chiranjivi added that they provided orientation to the TA staff, and the TA quality assurance would be ensured by providing capacity building interventions in different thematic areas soon. He mentioned that they understand the importance of capacity building for the Provincial and Local Governments. In the context of COVID-19 and adapting the ASIP, he mentioned that the progress was slow because they were not able to conduct trainings. The ASIPs of the provinces were approved and endorsed by the local government representatives following series of discussions, and they would continue to amend the ASIP on a need basis observing the same process. He added that the TA Work Plan for 2021 was not a separate plan but rather a part of the ASIP, and highlighted that they were very aware that fund release for the TA was on need basis, requesting funding that would and could be spent. Their prime focus was to spend the funds which were pending. He mentioned that they were on track with the communication plan, and he appreciated and thanked for all the feedback and comments

He then proceeded with the presentation of the issues, challenges and lessons learned. (see the slides of the presentation)

Annex-2: List of the Participants of third TASC meeting

Name	Designation	Organization
Dr. Gopi Kanal	JS/NPD and chair	MoFAGA/PLGSP
Chiranjivi Timisina	US/NPM	MoFAGA/PLGSP
Hari P. Guragain	Admin Officer	MoFAGA/PLGSP
Cynthia Rowe	Team Leader, Governance and Service Delivery Team (GSDT)	FCDO
Egbert Pos	Governance Advisor and Deputy Team Leader for GSDT	FCDO
Madhu Bishwakarma	Governance Advisor	FCDO
Preeti Das	Program Manager	FCDO
Dagny Mjøs	Minister Counsellor/Head of Development Cooperation	Royal Norwegian Embassy
Raj Kumar Dhungana	Governance Advisor	Royal Norwegian Embassy



Name	Designation	Organization
Silvana Hogg	Head of Cooperation/ Deputy Head of Mission	Embassy of Switzerland, SDC
Shradha Rayamajhi	National Programme Officer	Embassy of Switzerland, SDC
Rina Chettri	HR Officer	UNDP
Kristina Jovanovska	Fed Governance and DP Coordinator	UNDP/PLGSP
Bernardo Cocco	Deputy Resident Representative	UNDP
Tek Tamata	Portfolio Manager	UNDP
Krishna Prasad Bhattarai	Lead Officer; Project Coordination and Quality Assurance in Support of TA Engagement	UNDP
Surendra Bhandari	Administration and Finance Officer	PLGSP
Chandra Kanta Sharma Paudel	Coordination and Monitoring Specialist	PLGSP
Baburam Shrestha	PFM Specialist	PLGSP
Kirti Thapa	GESI Specialist	PLGSP
Dixita Silwal	HR and Liaison Specialist	PLGSP