

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Institutional consultancy to conduct a costing exercise for universalizing lower secondary education in Viet Nam

Summary

Title	Costing for universalizing lower secondary education
Purpose	To conduct a costing exercise to estimate the funding needs for Viet Nam to universalise lower secondary education according to the universal education roadmap, then devise sound recommendations of a feasible financing model.
Location	Ha Noi and selected provinces
Duration	May-October 2022
Start Date	May 2022
Reporting to	Chief of Social Policy and Governance
Type of consultancy	Institutional contract

1. Background and Justification

Viet Nam's commitment to education is visible in sizeable public and private investments and rising attainment levels. Since 2000, the government has committed approximately 20 percent of public expenditure on education – one of the highest in ASEAN. The 11th Party Central Committee's Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW dated November 4, 2013 on Fundamental and Comprehensive Education Reform set a goal of creating radical and drastic changes in education and training so that these changes reach higher levels of education services' quality, effectiveness and equity by 2030.

In the last seven years in implementing this Resolution, Viet Nam's education sector has achieved significant records which are well recognized by international community. According to the World Bank (2020)¹, Viet Nam's Human Capital Index reached 0.69, ranking 38th out of 174 economies. Educational performance of Viet Nam ranks 15th, equivalent to that of advanced countries such as the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Sweden. Viet Nam's positive performance in education has also been reflected in various indicators. In 2019, the enrollment rate and completion of primary education reached 92.08%, ranking in the top countries of ASEAN. The 2019 South East Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA PLM) results showed that the quality of Viet Nam's primary education ranks among the top of ASEAN countries². In the six countries participating in the assessment in 2019 including Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnamese primary school students were ranked the first in all 3 surveyed skills: reading, writing, and mathematics.

Apart from encouraging achievements, the education sectors are still facing enormous challenges, including poor institutional governance, teachers of uneven quality, inefficient distribution of teachers among provinces and regions, shortage of primary and secondary education services in urban areas where concentrate immigrant workers working in industrial parks, digital divide especially in remote, mountainous areas, and lack of effective, inclusive education for all children. All of these factors have led to disparities in the access to quality education services by different population segments. For example, only 48% children age 3-4 years in Mekong River Delta attended early childhood education programmes (ranked as the lowest among the six regions of Viet Nam). In addition, only 62.8% of Mong children enrolled in lower secondary education compared to 94.5% of their peers from Kinh and Hoa groups. Moreover, only more than half (51.2%) of children from the

¹ The World Bank (2020). *The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of Covid-19*.

² SEA-PLM (2019). *SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report*.

poorest households went to upper secondary schools compared to 96.4% of those from the richest families³.

Notably, the importance of lower secondary education has been well recognized by the National Assembly and the Government. Even prior to issuance of the Party's Resolution 29, the 10th National Assembly already the Resolution 41/2000/QH10 on nationwide universalization of lower secondary education in the period of 2001-2010. This Resolution set targets for Viet Nam, specifically *"By 2010, 95% of primary education graduates nationwide, of which 80% graduates in remote and extremely difficult areas, would be enrolled in lower secondary education"*. In addition, the Law on Education 2019 reflected Viet Nam's commitments to universal primary and lower secondary education via concrete stipulations on a roadmap for implementation, including tuition fee exemption for students at lower secondary education level, which were later further legally guided in Decree No. 81/2021/ND-CP by the Government.

After 10 years, those targets have been quantitatively achieved. According to former Minister of Education and Training in his speech in the Party Congress dated 27 January, 2021, the criteria of universal lower secondary education for level 1 were met nationwide while the criteria for levels 2 and 3 were realised in only 19 out of 63 provinces⁴. However, from a quality and equity perspective, the implementation of this policy remains a challenge for Viet Nam, especially in the context that Viet Nam is accelerating its progress in improving the quality of human resources by 2030 for sustainable development. Therefore, in order for Viet Nam to achieve its SDG targets related to education in general and lower secondary education in particular, it is crucial to calculate the costs for a quality and equitable universal lower secondary education policy and how the cost should be shared between public and private funding sources. Findings from this study are expected to shed better light on a comprehensive, feasible and equitable strategy for universal lower secondary education in coming years.

Justification: This exercise requires a high level of technical expertise, intensive human resources with good network and access to national and relevant data from ministries and government agencies in relation to education financing. Therefore, it is important for UNICEF to recruit an institution with relevant qualifications, competencies and skills in financial and economic analysis for social sectors, especially in education through a competitive bidding process.

2. Purpose and Objectives

Under the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF) project funded by the SDG Fund for Financing, UNICEF Viet Nam and the Department of Science, Education, Environment and Natural Resources of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) plan to conduct a study on estimating affordability of the universalizing lower secondary education in Viet Nam to have an overall picture of public and private expenditure on lower secondary education in order to provide recommendations for a comprehensive, feasible and equity strategy for Viet Nam to achieve its targets set for education, especially lower secondary education by 2025 and 2030. This study will support the MPI and UNICEF to continue their advocacy efforts with all relevant stakeholders particularly, Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Government on Viet Nam's implementation of the roadmap for universal lower secondary education.

³ GSO and UNICEF (2021). Survey measuring Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goal Indicators on Children and Women 2020-2021, Survey findings report. Hanoi, Viet Nam: General Statistics Office.

⁴ According to Decree 20/2014/ND-CP dated 24 March 2014 on Universal Education and Eradication of Illiteracy, Standard Level 1 for universal lower secondary education requires 80% of teenagers from 15 to 18 year old nationwide (and 70% in remote areas) graduated from this level of education, while Standard Level 2 and 3 requires those percentages of 90% (80%) and 95% (90%) respectively.

Following are the specific objectives of the exercise:

- To have systematic understanding of existing policies, especially those on financing, related to Viet Nam's SDGs targets for education, especially lower secondary education and general education universalization in Viet Nam.
- To estimate the required funding needs for quality and inclusive⁵ universalization of lower secondary education for each level of universalisation by the set timeline with different scenarios in priority order.
- To recommend a sound funding diversification strategy to meet targets of lower secondary education universalization policy by 2025 and 2030 taking into account the financing role of the state, the family and the private sector.

3. Research question, scope and methodology

Study question:

This costing exercise will attempt to answer the overall question: "How much does it cost for Viet Nam to achieve the criteria of quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education at level 2 and level 3⁶ by 2025 and by 2030?"

The above overall question is followed by specific questions as below:

- What are Viet Nam's goals and targets set for lower secondary education by 2030?
- What are Viet Nam's existing legal frameworks, policies and plans related to universal lower education?
- What is the situation of universal lower secondary education: progresses, challenges and ways forward?
- What is the budget required for a quality and equitable universalization of lower secondary education in Viet Nam?
- What is a feasible and equitable funding strategy to meet requirements of the quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education? What are the roles of the State, families, and private sector)?

Scope: The work will be implemented with the central government (in Ha Noi) and in-depth case studies will be conducted in two provinces/cities (one better off and one poor province). The selection of these provinces/cities will be done in consultation with MPI and UNICEF.

This assignment will cover the following areas:

1. **Review all existing policies and legal documents related to Viet Nam's SDGs targets for education and education financing, especially on lower secondary education and general education universalization in Viet Nam. These will include but not limited to the following suggested documents:**
 - Law on Education 2019
 - National Plan of Action for the Implementation of SDGs including Education Plan of Action for SDG implementation.
 - Education Sector Development Strategy and Plan for 2021-2030.
 - All policies related to universalization of general education, including legal frameworks and policy implementation related to the development of lower secondary education sub-sector, and funding arrangements.

⁵ The concept of quality and inclusive education is in line with the Law on Education 2019 and sustainable development goals related to education to ensure quality education for every child with a focus on the most vulnerable children including those with disabilities, ethnic minority students, migrant students, those from poor families.

⁶ Levels of education universalization is defined in the Decree #20/2014/NĐ-CP on education universalisation and illiteracy elimination.

- Socialisation policy in education.
 - All relevant policies, legal documents and funding diversification strategy that was implemented specifically for Vietnam's recent universalization of 1 year preschool education (for 5 year old children).
 - All relevant research and studies on the access to quality and inclusive lower secondary education services.
 - Viet Nam's latest reports on its progresses towards SDG targets related to education and implications for future policies.
2. **Assess current public and private expenditures on lower secondary education.**
 - Review public expenditures on lower secondary education based on State Treasury's data and compare with other general education levels (i.e., primary education and upper secondary education).
 - Estimate private expenditure on lower secondary education based on data from Viet Nam Household Living Standard Surveys (VHLSS) and relevant available data sources.
 - Assess data on state budget allocation and utilization for the sector in 2016-2020 period with a reference to the 2015 State Budget Law.
 3. **Estimate the required funding needs for a quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education.**
 - Review the national strategies or directions on lower secondary education universalization in the period of 2021-2030 and conduct necessary discussions/interviews with key stakeholders, from which to define the terms of, and criteria for "quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education". This review should focus on the most marginalized groups of students including but not limited to those with disabilities, ethnic minority students, migrant students, those from poor families in order to ensure financial resources that will effectively improve the quality and inclusion in education for these children. This review should include the estimation of hidden costs including extra tutoring, textbooks and learning materials. In addition, gender lens should be taken to ensure equal opportunities to access quality education for every child.
 - Estimate financial resource required for getting the "quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education", taking into account all significant factors including demographic changes.
 4. **Provide recommendations for a comprehensive, feasible and equitable funding strategy to meet requirements of the "quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education".**
 - Design different scenarios for public and private funding scenarios for the "quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education".
 - Provide sound policy recommendations.

Methodology

The selected institutional consultancy team will be required to present a mix methodology (both quantitative and qualitative) to conduct this assignment. It is anticipated that the research plan will comprise of the following components:

1. **Desk review** of, but not limited to legal frameworks, policies, plans and relevant documents and studies related to Viet Nam's SDGs targets for education, especially lower secondary education and general education's universalization in Viet Nam. The desk review will guide the design of the subsequent steps and detailed methodology as well as tools, including the selection of localities for field research.
2. **Quantitative/statistical analysis** will be applied for using all quantitative data and statistics from State Treasury and Viet Nam Household Living Standards Surveys for the period of 2016-2020 to assess current public and private expenditures on lower secondary education. The research team is also expected to run simulation to propose different scenarios for a comprehensive, feasible

and equitable funding strategy to meet requirements of the quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education.

3. **Qualitative approach** will be applied for primary data collection, using a range of tools such as semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, at both national and subnational levels in two proposed selected provinces/cities.

Qualitative analysis will explore the following aspects:

- (i) Assess issues related to public allocation on universal lower secondary education;
- (ii) Key challenges families face in order to maintain their children’s attendance at lower secondary schools. This includes hidden costs including extra tutoring, textbooks, learning materials and other extra contributions;
- (iii) Define the terms of, criteria and recommendations for quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education.

It is expected that the field research will be carried out in at least two provinces / cities (with representation of a poor province with high proportion of ethnic minority population and a better off locality) to draw out in-depth and diverse case studies related to lower secondary education. The institutions can propose additional criteria relevant for the selection of the localities and to answer the overall study question.

4. **Participatory and consultative approach:** The consultants will work closely with MPI, UNICEF, MOF and MOET to propose a concrete research plan and methodological framework with a gender and equity lens to optimize their contribution, including identification of key stakeholders, development of research tools and draft reports, and engaging local authorities in preparing and implementing field research.

4. Specific tasks and deliverables

This assignment will require the involvement of a research team including at least 2 members (one lead researcher equivalent to P4 level if international or VNM4 level if national and one national researcher equivalent to VNM3 level)

Task summary	Deliverables	Time Frame (no of days) Tentative Dates
1. Develop an inception report including a detailed workplan and review of all existing policies and legal documents related to Viet Nam’s SDGs targets for education, especially lower secondary education and general education’s universalization in Viet Nam and ethical clearance.	- Available inception report including a detailed workplan and review of all existing policies and legal documents related to Viet Nam’s SDGs targets for education, especially lower secondary education and general education’s universalization in Viet Nam and ethical clearance.	10 days (05 days for each researcher) (04-15 May 2022)
2. Assess current public and private expenditures on lower secondary education.	- Available data on public expenditure on lower secondary education in 2016-2020, and other general education levels (including	20 days (05 days for lead consultant and 15 days for team member) (16 May-15 June 2022)

	<p>primary and upper secondary educations).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available analysis of private expenditure on lower secondary education in comparison with other general education levels from database of VHLSS 2018 and 2020. 	
3. Estimate the required funding needs for a quality universal lower secondary education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available estimates of funding needs for a quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education reflect views and inputs of key stakeholders, from which to define the terms of, and criteria for “quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education” at the central level and from two participating provinces. 	45 days (15 days for lead consultant and 30 days for research member) (15 June - 15 August 2022)
4. Draft a full report containing: cost determinants of a quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education; costs for attaining universal lower secondary education by each level and by timeline; priority order; and recommendations on a comprehensive, feasible and equitable funding strategy to meet requirements of the “quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available draft report on a comprehensive, feasible and equitable funding strategy for reaching “quality and inclusive universal lower secondary education” with different scenarios for public and private funding scenarios and sound policy recommendations. 	30 days for both researchers (15 days for lead consultant and 15 days for research member) (15 August – 30 September 2022)
5. Validate the report with key stakeholders including UNICEF, MPI, MOF and MOET.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available final full report, 5 page brief and 15 slide power point presentation taking into account all the inputs and comments from key stakeholders including UNICEF, MPI, MOF and MOET. 	3 days for both researchers (03 days for lead consultant and 03 days for research member)
Total number of days		108 days

Duration: The timeframe for this institutional contract is 108 days (43 days for team leader and 57 days for team member), between 04 May – 30 October 2022. All deliverables are expected to be developed in both Vietnamese and English, with the responsibility for translation belonging to the contracted institution.

5. Management

The assignment will be undertaken under the supervision of the Chief of Social Policy and Governance Programme (SPG) with the day-to-day support of the focal points - the Social Policy and Governance and Education Specialists (Social Policy and Governance and Education Programmes). UNICEF Viet Nam’s focal points will ensure that a consolidated workplan for this assignment facilitates the joint work of both contracted institution with quality assurance and technical inputs and advice from

UNICEF, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education and Training.

6. Payment Schedule

The payment for the contract will be in two installments:

- The 1st payment upon the approval of the inception, desk review report, research protocols and ethical clearance (deliverable#1) (30%)
- The final payment upon the approval of the final report (deliverables #2, #3, #4 & 5) (70%)

7. Performance indicators for evaluation

- Quality of deliverables meets the standards set by UNICEF and specifications outlined in the contract;
- Deliverables are submitted in a timely manner, as per the timeline in the contract;
- Technical assistance delivered in a contextualized and drawing on inputs provided by the partners.

8. Qualification

An institution that is able to deploy a team comprised of at least one lead consultant and one team member/s with the following qualifications:

Senior lead consultant who has strong knowledge and technical capacity in education financing.

- Holding an advanced university degree (master or higher) in social science, economics, international development, public policy, public administration, financing, including sound knowledge of education programming and familiarity with the rights of children.
- Having extensive experience (at least 15 years) with an excellent understanding of financing especially education sector, public investment, and must have extensive experience in education – planning, implementing, financing.
- Knowledge about socio-economic context and political economy of Viet Nam context is desirable.
- Having a dedicated team leadership and management track record, as well as excellent financial analysis, communication and report writing skills .
- Having in-depth knowledge of the UN's human rights, gender equality and equity agendas.
- Committed and willing to work independently, with limited regular supervision; s/he must demonstrate adaptability and flexibility, client orientation, proven ethical practice, initiative, concern for accuracy and quality.
- The ability to concisely and clearly express ideas and concepts in written and oral form as well as the ability to communicate with various stakeholders in English.

Requirements for team member/s

- Advanced degree in public (social) policy, development studies, economics, statistics and another relevant field.
- Over 10 years of experience in undertaking financial analysis using both secondary and primary data from different sources.
- In-depth knowledge on public finance management and financing for education.
- Knowledge of Viet Nam's socio-economic context as well as education financing would be an asset.
- Good listening skills as well as reporting writing and communication skills.

- Excellent team work skills.

9. Structure of the Technical Proposal

Interested institutions are required to submit a detailed technical proposal including the following:

1. Credentials document outlining the expertise of the company, detailing general and specific experience with similar clients and assignments, including the samples (e.g., reports, materials, products) of past relevant works.
 2. Details of the proposed team for the assignment including the following information:
 - Title/Designation of each team member on the project
 - Past experience in working on similar project and assignments – List similar projects they worked on and their roles on the project.
 - The team needs to include different members who have background and working experience in the following key fields: economic analysis, public health research/study or social studies, etc.
 3. Provide a brief summary of the approach which the agency would take to meet the specific objectives and deliverables outlined above.
- *Submissions must be made in English.*
 - *No price information should be contained in the technical proposal.*
 - *Any submissions made outside of the allotted time frame or without adequate information will be automatically disqualified.*

10. Evaluation process and methods

Weighted ratio between the technical and the price criteria: (80:20)

Such the proposed programme is new and not available in Viet Nam. Given the newness, complexity, and strong requirement of innovative and creativity of the assignment, the ratio between the technical and the financial proposal for this task is 80:20 respectively. Only those proposals that score 60% of technical points on the technical proposal will be shortlisted.

Each technical proposal will be assessed first on its technical merits and subsequently on its price. A maximum of 80 points is allocated to the technical component and 20 points for the price component, with a maximum possible total score of 100 points.

The proposal obtaining the overall highest score after adding the scores for the technical and financial proposals is the proposal that offers best value for money and will be recommended for award of the contract. UNICEF will set up an evaluation panel composed of technical UNICEF staff.

In making the final decision, UNICEF considers both technical and financial aspects. The evaluation panel first reviews the technical aspect of the offer, followed by the review of the financial offer of the technically compliant vendors.

The proposals will be evaluated against the following two elements:

a) Technical Proposal

Criteria		Points
1	Company Information	5
1.1	Legal Structure (Registration and taxes)	
1.2	Years of expertise and experience	
1.4	Financial capacities (Statement on consolidated sales and revenue in the past 5 years)	
2	Technical Expertise	30
2.1	Relevance of the approach to meet the specific objectives and reach the specific target audience	
2.2	Present/prior similar experience working with high profile customers (name of clients and project engagements)	

2.3	Technical services	
3	Personnel	30
3.1	Management position and technical competences (CV)	
3.2	Number of key staff assigned to the project management	
4	Innovative and Creative portfolio, particularly in COVID-19 pandemic	15
4.1	Samples of innovative and flexible research methodologies in emergency/epidemic contexts	
4.2	Samples with demonstrated experience in financial and economic research, studies, and analysis in education sector	
	Total	80

b) Financial Proposal

The Financial Proposal should be broken down for each component of the proposed work. Please make sure to have separate line items in price proposal for the following:

- Strategy and planning
- Creative Conception and Execution
- Field visit, consultation - data collection
- Designing and development process and options
- Consultation and finalization of the products

Mandatories

- All prices/rates quoted must be exclusive of all taxes as UNICEF is a tax-exempt organization.
- Financial Proposal must be submitted separately to Technical Proposal.
- The total amount of points allocated for the price component is 20. (The maximum number of points will be allotted to the lowest price proposal of the technically qualified proposals).
- UNICEF will award the contract to the vendor whose response is of high quality and meets the specific objectives.
- All Proposals must be signed and stamped by the Proposers and in pdf. format.