PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

A.   Description of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

1.   The Additional Skill Acquisition Program (ASAP) has been designed by the Department of Higher Education and the Department of General Education, Government of Kerala to complement post-basic education—higher secondary (grades 11 and 12) and undergraduate college—with market-driven vocational training to make it more employment-oriented. The proposed loan will reinforce ASAP's efforts in providing the disadvantaged youth of Kerala, enrolled in government and government-aided schools and colleges, with the opportunity of improving their English communication and basic information technology skills, and of gaining proficiency in vocational skills that are in demand in the high-growth service sector and emerging technology areas. By providing additional vocational skills and career counseling, ASAP will enhance the employability of the youth and make them market-ready by the time they graduate. Under the proposed loan, ASAP will provide level 1 certification, which is equivalent to levels 3–5 (i.e., basic diploma) of India's National Skills Qualification Framework.[1] The impact of the loan will be increased employment of Kerala's youth (aged 15–24 years). The outcome will be increased employability of ASAP certificate holders.

2.   ASAP's core philosophy emphasizes that the design and delivery of its vocational courses should be aligned with the changing needs of the market, and that overall implementation should be results-oriented. The program soundness assessment discusses how the ASAP secretariat has been coordinating with industry associations, sector skills councils, and the National Skill Development Corporation to identify relevant vocational courses (i.e., for which there is market demand and a match with youth aspirations), and to design the course material and delivery methods accordingly.[2] Through a transparent competitive bidding process, ASAP is engaging experienced private and public training providers and industry bodies to impart vocational training. It is committed to expanding and institutionalizing this consultation process so that the effectiveness of different vocational courses can be evaluated and the required improvements undertaken.

3.   Once relevant vocational training courses have been designed and good training providers are engaged, it is critical to have a strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for capturing qualitative and quantitative dimensions to ensure that the inputs—i.e., foundation training in English communication and basic information technology provided by skill development executives (SDEs), and sector-specific vocational training imparted by private and public training providers—get translated into the desired outputs and outcomes. The M&E framework should provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of program planning and implementation. This will improve ASAP's alignment with the market and ensure that the funds are targeted toward enhancing the employability and employment prospects of ASAP trainees.

4.   The Department of Higher Education (executing agency) and the ASAP secretariat (implementing agency) are committed to continuous and comprehensive M&E. The ASAP secretariat, which started functioning in July 2012, has a dedicated Quality Control Unit with six

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[1] ASAP will develop advanced vocational courses by 2017 so that it can offer certification at levels 2 and 3, which would translate to levels 6 and 7 (i.e., advanced diploma) of the National Skills Qualification Framework. ASAP's skills proficiency certification for levels 1 and 2 will be offered either by the state government or jointly by industry and government depending on the skills course. The level 3 ASAP certification will be offered jointly by industry, a university, and the government.

[2] Program Soundness Assessment (accessible from the list of linked documents in Appendix 2).

staff to focus on M&E.[3] A comprehensive management information system (MIS) has been designed to collect sex-disaggregated data on different aspects of ASAP as indicated in Table 1 below. A user manual has been prepared for MIS to train ASAP staff in its use. The MIS became fully operational with effect from 1 August 2014.

Table 1: Management Information System[4]

Report	Parameters on which information is collected
Institution (i.e., schools and colleges partnering with ASAP)	Details of institutions focusing on various parameters (e.g., location, courses offered, staff strength, student enrollment, batch size, names of PMs and SDEs); number of batches allocated to an institution and their nature (foundation courses and vocational courses); and details regarding affiliation with CSPs and SDCs
Student details	Basic student details (e.g., name, gender, age, socioeconomic background, academic background, performance in ASAP's foundation and vocational training, drop-out or not, status after exiting from ASAP)
Programs	Details of sector-specific vocational courses offered by training partners, curriculum content, and schedule of delivery; basic details on trainers and instructors and their background qualifications and experience
CSPs and SDCs	Details of CSPs and SDCs focusing on various parameters (e.g., location, courses offered, staff strength, student enrollment, batch size, targets, training providers); PPP partner (if any) for running the CSP and SDC
Staff	Basic details of PMs and SDEs; status of KPIs and deliverables assigned to PMs or SDEs such as status of courses, video monitoring of training, career counselling, follow-up with students, and targets
Training partners	Details of the training partners; details of MOU with ASAP (with timelines and deliverables); number of courses delivered and students trained; internships offered; and partnerships with industry associations
Industry partners or firms where ASAP trainees do their internships	Basic details of industry partners with various parameters (e.g., location, internships or courses offered, ASAP trainees enrolled; survey feedback to capture "satisfaction" with ASAP trainees (proxy for the "employability" of ASAP trainees at the end of the internship)

ASAP = Additional Skill Acquisition Program, CSP = community skills park, KPI = key performance indicator, MOU = memorandum of understanding, PM = program manager, PPP = public–private partnership, SDC = skill development center, SDE = skill development executive.
Source: Asian Development Bank.

5.   The ASAP MIS will collect all the required information, which can then be sliced and analyzed from different perspectives: trainees (disaggregated by sex), trainers (including SDEs and training providers disaggregated by sex), foundation and vocational courses, the individual community skills parks (CSPs) and skill development centers (SDCs), and also by grouping the CSPs and SDCs by district. The district program managers and the staff of the schools and colleges that partner with ASAP enter information on the trainees under their purview directly into the web-based ASAP portal linked to the MIS. Likewise, the program managers, who are in charge of CSPs and SDCs, also enter information on all training activities. The ASAP MIS will

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[3] The other business units within the ASAP secretariat focus on (i) strategy and design, (ii) research and analysis, (iii) training program management, (iv) finance and audit, (v) general administration, and (vi) lifelong learning.
[4] All information on students, program managers, and SDEs is disaggregated by sex.

thus, help the ASAP secretariat track of what is working well and what is not, and to take the required corrective action on time.

6.   The ASAP secretariat has also designed a protocol for capturing qualitative information on the effectiveness of its career counseling and training. First, the members of the ASAP secretariat and program managers visit ASAP classes at regular intervals to observe the quality of training delivery and interact with students, instructors, and principals to get feedback. Periodic surveys are undertaken so that the response of students and trainers is captured. Second, some random training courses are videotaped while in session so that qualified subject experts and evaluators can review the quality of pedagogy and training being imparted by the SDEs and training instructors. The overall effectiveness of the training delivery is then judged on the basis of a composite score. Trainers receiving less than the qualifying score will be required to attend a "retraining" exercise, and be reassessed thereafter. If adequate improvement is not seen even after the retraining, alternative trainers will be engaged.

7.   The MIS and periodic stakeholder surveys and consultations will help to gather information on:

(i)   sector-specific skills and soft skills gained by the trainees, as captured and assessed at entry, midcourse, and at course conclusion;

(ii)   feedback of trainees on their learning experience and quality of the foundation and vocational training courses;

(iii)   feedback of the trainers on student participation and performance; and

(iv)   response of the institutions where ASAP trainees are offered internships and/or get employed.

8.   Based on the overall findings, changes can be made to the design of different courses and/or implementation modalities. The ASAP secretariat has also launched an online learning management system using the popular open-source software Moodle. The ASAP lifelong learning system will cater to the learning needs of both project officials and students. It will use innovative approaches like Massive Open Online Course to enhance reach and to train students and trainers. The ASAP secretariat has thus adopted a multidimensional strategy to ensure transparency, quality, and accountability while enhancing outreach.

B.   Assessment of the Monitoring and Evaluation System

9.   As discussed above, the ASAP MIS captures information on critical dimensions such as gender, inclusiveness (specifically of socially and economically marginalized or differently abled students), geographical spread, and sector of training. This will help track the outcome indicator and all output indicators, including the disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs) 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The MIS will facilitate evidence-based planning and help flag potential problems early on.

10.   The impact indicator is "increased employment of Kerala's youth," while the outcome indicator is "increased employability of ASAP certificate holders." Since some ASAP graduates may continue their education for another 1–2 years after getting the certificate, tracking employment outcomes (i.e., the impact) will be difficult. Similarly, the concept of "employability" is subjective and cannot be measured solely through an MIS, however well designed. It refers to a person's ability to gain and retain employment, and depends on a mix of factors: (i) a person's

basic education; (ii) vocational skills relative to the needs of a particular job or market environment; (iii) awareness of and ability to access relevant job opportunities; and (iv) soft skills including interpersonal skills, work ethics, and fluency in the main business language. It is context-specific and affected by both supply and demand-side factors.

11.   Through the proposed technical assistance, Asian Development Bank will help the secretariat in addressing the conceptual, methodological, and practical challenges of tracking the main outcome indicator (DLI 1), i.e., "increased employability of female and male ASAP certificate holders over the 2016 baseline." An index of employability will be designed and tested. It will draw on multiple sources—feedback from firms where ASAP trainees undertake internships, employer surveys, and tracer studies to establish a baseline (by 2016). This will be tracked over time to assess and improve the effectiveness of ASAP's design and implementation so that the overall employability of its certificate holders improves. ASAP certificate holders, who wish to look for jobs soon after getting their certificates instead of continuing with higher education, will also be tracked to assess whether or not they are able to get placed within a reasonable time. A detailed M&E strategy will be prepared to use a multipronged approach consisting of the MIS, beneficiary group feedback, and periodic tracer studies and M&E surveys of firms to establish the baseline, and track the outputs, outcomes, and ultimately the impact. This will also help triangulate the findings established through the MIS.

C.   Managing Risks and Improving Capacity

12.   The ASAP MIS is well designed and has been fully operational since 1 August 2014. The large team of program managers engaged by the ASAP secretariat regularly interface with the students and trainers, principals (of schools and colleges), and representatives of industry associations and sector skills councils; and supplement the quantitative data captured by the MIS with qualitative feedback and surveys. The capacity development technical assistance will help the secretariat build on this information by designing and conducting rigorous tracer studies and surveys to measure and track employability and employment outcomes. It will also support skill-gap analysis to gauge demand for skilled workers within and outside Kerala.

13.   The ASAP secretariat has also agreed to engage, through a competitive and transparent process, a third-party firm to undertake independent validation of the outputs and outcomes. As a result of this multipronged approach, it will be possible to track the outputs and outcomes of the proposed loan, as reflected in the results framework below (Table 2).

Table 2: Results Framework

Results Indicator	DLI (Yes/No)	Reporting Mechanism
Increased employability of female and male ASAP certificate holders (relative to 2016 baseline)	Yes	Third-party validation Tracer studies and M&E surveys
1.1. Number of new or updated industry-accredited vocational courses offered (cumulative)	Yes	ASAP annual reports and ASAP MIS
1.2 Number of students enrolled in vocational courses during vacation	No	ASAP annual reports and ASAP MIS
2.1 (i) CSPs with modern training facilities, gender-	Yes	ASAP annual reports and

Results Indicator	DLI (Yes/No)	Reporting Mechanism
friendly design, and easy access for physically impaired established and operationalized (ii) Number of SDCs renovated to specified standards		ASAP MIS
2.2 Proportion of CSPs for which O&M is outsourced to private partners (cumulative basis as a share of the number of CSPs established and operationalized)	No	ASAP annual reports
3.1 Number of students enrolled for ASAP level 1 courses (cumulative)	Yes	ASAP MIS
3.2 Number of MOUs signed with schools and colleges (cumulative)	No	ASAP annual reports and ASAP MIS
3.3 Number of private training providers engaged under ASAP (cumulative basis)	Yes	ASAP annual reports and ASAP MIS
3.4 Number of MOUs with SSCs, industry partners, and prospective employers established	No	ASAP annual reports and ASAP MIS
4.1 Experienced program management staff (including chartered accountant and procurement specialist) engaged	No	ASAP annual reports
4.2 Number of SDEs empaneled	Yes	ASAP MIS
4.3 ASAP MIS (including financial MIS) to monitor implementation, and gender and social inclusion targets, operationalized	No	MIS reports
4.4 Quality assurance system established and operationalized	No	ASAP annual reports

ASAP = Additional Skill Acquisition Program, CSP = community skills park, DLI = disbursement-linked indicator, M&E = monitoring and evaluation, MIS = management information system, MOU = memorandum of understanding, O&M = operation and maintenance, SDC = skill development center, SDE = skill development executive, SSC = sector skills council.
Source: Asian Development Bank.