

Social Assessment for Vietnam School Education Assurance Project (SEQAP)



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Abbreviations

BOET	Bureau of Education and Training, (District level)
CEM	Committee for Ethnic Minorities
DFID	U.K. Department for International Development
DOET	Department of Education and Training, (Provincial level)
FDS	full-day school
FSQL	Fundamental School Quality Levels
HDS	half-day school
HEPR	Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
PDCED	Program for Socio-Economic Development in Communes faced with Extreme Difficulties (also known as Program 135)
PEDC	Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children (project)
PPU	MOET SEQAP Project Preparation Unit
SEQAP	School Education Assurance Project

Introduction

The social assessment for School Education Assurance Project (SEQAP) is an activity planned to support the overall design of SEQAP and its overarching goal to improve the quality of primary education in Vietnam.

The social assessment for SEQAP is financed by the Vietnam office of the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID). The social assessment is an input into the World Bank SEQAP project design team and the SEQAP Preparation Unit of the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET).

A prominent feature of SEQAP is to improve education quality in primary schools through support to a viable strategy and infrastructure investments for the implementation of full-day schooling, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Therefore, the specific focus of the social assessment is to obtain the views of education stakeholders in ethnic minority communities about recommendations for the full-day school (FDS) program.

FDS addresses one of the main shortcomings of the Vietnamese basic education system, the number of hours of instruction. Over the last decade, the Government of Vietnam has endorsed the need for increased instructional hours and begun to move from half-day school (HDS) to FDS. Pupils in FDS receive 30–35 class periods per week, in comparison with 22–25 periods per week in HDS.

The social assessment for SEQAP contacted local communities to learn their views and opinions to best plan strategies for improving primary education that meets community needs. The social assessment interviews were designed to gather input on experiences with FDS implementation where it has been applied, or opinions about moving toward FDS in new locations. Participants in the study included local officials, parents and grandparents, students, teachers, and school officials involved as stakeholders in quality education in their community.

Studies elsewhere confirm the overall enrollment rate of ethnic minorities in basic education in Vietnam, as well as their learning outcomes, are lower than the average. The findings identify physical distance, financial cost, opportunity costs to education, differential benefits from education, language of instruction, discriminatory gender practices, and other factors as barriers to education for ethnic minority children. This social assessment activity works to ensure the disadvantaged ethnic minority communities are adequately consulted regarding their views on educational constraints and their preferences regarding measures to improve educational attainment.

Methodology for Social Assessment

The social assessment activity included a set of structured interviews with poor, disadvantaged, and ethnic minority stakeholders in two selected provinces to understand their perception of FDS education. Participatory and qualitative interviews with key informants provided insights to verify key access issues for poor, disadvantaged, and ethnic minority children to understand their constraints to participating in the FDS program and to support preparation of the SEQAP project design.

In October 2008, the SEQAP Preparation Unit of MOET (PPU), DFID, and the World Bank SEQAP design team selected the provinces of Lao Cai (Northern Highlands) and Kon Tum (Central Highlands) as the two provinces of focus for the social assessment. Lao Cai and Kon Tum provinces were judged to be representative of locations with poor and disadvantaged communities and large ethnic minority populations facing issues of low education achievement.

A team of social scientists experienced in undertaking participatory research on education, ethnic minority, poor, and disadvantaged children education in rural areas of Vietnam was assembled to undertake the assessment.¹ The 4-person social assessment team of consultants prepared a brief research plan, including outlines for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in the two provinces. The research plan was reviewed and approved with DFID and the World Bank project preparatory personnel prior to the team undertaking field activities.

The field surveys were undertaken in Lao Cai and Kon Tum provinces between 28 October and 9 November 2008. The study team divided itself into two, 2-person subgroups to cover the selected provinces, and applied a consistent methodology and consultative approach across the two locations. Each team in each province completed 7 days of field work, with intensive time working at the commune and school level.

The key informant interviews within each province focused on education quality issues to gain insights into the opportunities and constraints facing ethnic minority populations with regard to the implementation of full-day schooling. Conversations with key contacts examined issues of school management, teaching and learning, and participation as part of the assessment. The field activities were organized to facilitate contact with provincial and district officials, commune leadership, village heads, and school community stakeholders. Focus group discussions were organized with school principals, teachers, and parent groups.

The methodology for engaged constituents in each province was as follows. The approach began with provincial-level meetings with the Provincial Department of Education and Training (DOET) and Provincial Office of Culture, Tourism and Sport. The teams then met with one district per province to interview staff of the District Bureau of Education and Training (BOET). The focus district was determined by targeting a district location that was predominantly poor and disadvantaged, and was heavily populated by ethnic minorities. The targeted district also needed to be an area with a diversity of ethnic minority groups, and included communes with significant concentrations of the largest ethnic minority group in a given province. Experience in the implementation of FDS was also a factor in district selection.

From the district level, the teams worked in three communes per district. The communes selected were representative by nature in their ethnic minority populations and poor and disadvantaged economic conditions. Selected communes also needed to provide a representative sample of moderately poor and very poor villages, populated heavily by the larger ethnic minority groups.

¹ Under contract to RTI International, U.S., the social assessment study team members included Mr. Myles Elledge (team leader), Mr. Vuong Xuan Tinh, Ms. Dao Van Vy, and Ms. Nguyen Phuong Hong.

For each of the two provinces, the following sampling approach was deployed:

- Provincial DOET
- BOET, one district
- Commune leadership, three communes
- In each commune, main school principal, assistant principal, head teachers, and teachers
- In each commune, satellite school principals and teachers, at least two per satellite schools
- In each commune, parent group discussions drawing parents from the main school and satellite school villages.

Within each commune, the teams met with commune leadership, the main schools in each commune, and at least two satellite schools in each commune. At the school level, key informant interviews were conducted with school principals and assistant principals and teachers at both the main school and satellite schools. Parent focus group meetings were held to gain insights from both the main school and satellite school village communities. As a matter of course, site visits at the school level observed and interacted with primary school students. Emphasis in the social assessment was placed on parents, and the relationship principals and teachers had with parents and issues of FDS.

The social assessment is qualitative in nature, given both the points of emphasis for the tasks and the time allocated to each provincial field visit. The World Bank–supported SEQAP design process previously completed extensive field surveys on teacher quality and qualitative and quantitative surveys on full-day schooling in a large number of provinces. This social assessment focused on parental input, and engaged principals and teachers to gather their perspectives on FDS in their communities in order to fill gaps not covered by the previous SEQAP surveys.

Interview questions gathered data and opinions on educational constraints, insights on participant views of full-day schooling, and their preferences for measures that might facilitate the implementation of full-day schooling and improve educational attainment. Interviews focused on school principals, teachers and parents in primary school grades 1–5, although input was gathered about kindergarten classes, where available.

At the school level, the structured conversations with principals were comprehensive in meeting with the all representatives of the school leadership. Individual and group discussions with teachers at the main schools and at satellite schools included teacher representatives drawn from different ethnic groups, and included men and women teachers. In both the main school and satellite school communities, parental group discussions included diverse participation to gather perspectives from a cross-section of ethnic groups, men and women, and parent association members and, importantly, nonmembers. Interactions with primary students in grades 1–5, of varying ethnic groups, also were part of the school visits and discussions.

Commune and school leadership complimented the social assessment team and the approach of the study. Several actors noted and appreciated the 2-plus days of time invested at the school and commune levels. School principals noted that they had often been visited by international donor and MOET delegations that observed their schools and asked questions about minority education. However, few teams had ever invested in actually “working” with the principals for the duration of time this social assessment team had done, or traveled to remote village parent homes and satellite schools—even in the event of wet and cool weather.

Provincial Insights

This section of the social assessment report presents insights and the perspectives gained from field visits in Lao Cai and Kon Tum provinces. The content of consultations with key stakeholders is reported by broad location (e.g., Province, District, Commune, village, and school) and by the type of key informant (e.g., principal, village leader, teacher, and parent).² Key findings are reported to provide stakeholder perceptions on full-day schooling and share observations on key access issues for poor, disadvantaged ethnic minority communities.

Lao Cai

Lao Cai Province is located in the north of the country and borders the provinces of Ha Giang, Yen Bai, Son La, and Lai Chau, as well as Yunnan Province, China. Like many Northern Highland provinces, Lao Cai is mountainous and heavily forested, and agriculture and forestry activities are its dominant economic activity. Cross-border trade and ecotourism are growing in importance as the transport infrastructure has improved with support from Program 135. Lao Cai has 144 communes, of which 131 are classified as poor communes.

Lao Cai is among the poorer provinces of Vietnam, and it is heavily populated by highland ethnic minority groups. The population of Lao Cai includes 14 different ethnic groups, with the Hmong, Phu La, Tay, Dao, Thai, Nung, Giay, and Ha Nhi being the most prominent. Lao Cai Province has a total population of 595,380, and 70 percent of the total population are ethnic minorities. Most of the ethnic minorities live in the more rural villages, outside of central towns.

Provincial MOET. Following the methodology of the social assessment, the study team initiated its work in Lao Cai province by meeting with stakeholders in the provincial-level DOET. The key points from the provincial-level discussion are noted here.

Lao Cai Province pursued the goal of compulsory education in 2000. Most primary-aged children now go to school, including those in the highland areas, and participation rates are reported at more than 99 percent. The sustained investment in school facilities and substantial facility upgrades, in line with meeting national standards for infrastructure and teacher quality, have supported the tremendous improvement in access to education.

The participation of ethnic minority children in primary school has also seen steady improvement over the past 10 years. The current primary school student population is in excess of 47,000 ethnic minority pupils.

Primary School Pupils, Lao Cai Province

Province	Total Primary Pupils	Total Ethnic Minority Primary Pupils	% Ethnic Minority Primary Pupils
Lao Cai	62,465	47,852	76%

Vietnam General Statistical Office (2007)

There are 234 primary schools in Lao Cai Province, and 131 are implementing full-day schooling. Forty-eight of the 234 primary schools have boarding room facilities, mostly to house students in grades 4 and 5. Primary-level boarding schools for Grades 4 and 5 are recognized by the province education leadership

² The names of schools, the names of stakeholders, and the attribution of the stakeholder's comments are not reported here in compliance with RTI's institutional review board practices for research ethics and protocol, including the anonymity of research survey participants to protect the rights of the participants. Photographs were taken and used with approval of the participants.

as an effective means to boost school attendance and raise student achievement through longer and more consistent student-teacher relations and instruction.

The province education leadership worked with district and commune officials to promote and encourage full-day schooling. The provincial education leadership is encouraged by gains in school participation, and recognizes quality improvements as a result of the implementation of full-day schooling.

In Lao Cai Province, the implementation of FDS has been delegated to the commune and school level. Data on FDS implementation is inconsistent, because the extent of FDS seems underreported at both the national and provincial levels. At the national level, MOET indicated 10 schools in Bac Ha District (the district of focus for this assessment) were implementing FDS. As the district-level visits reveal, FDS is fully implemented (100 percent) in Bac Ha District, although the Province and National MOET are not fully aware of the extent of FDS implementation.

Individual schools, principals, and their teachers have delegated authority to determine the best structure to execute the extended day and how to organize the delivery of the curriculum. Across the province, periods per week have ranged from 30 to 35 under FDS. In the highland and ethnic minority populated areas, the emphasis has been on implementing afternoon sessions of either 3 or 4 days per week, focused primarily on supplemental afternoon lessons in math and Vietnamese language. This focus on math and Vietnamese language in FDS is reported to have paid dividends in more rapid learning and improved student achievement with ethnic minority students. One afternoon per week is devoted to a teacher meeting.

Teacher quality in Lao Cai Province is regarded as good by the Provincial MOET, and generally meets the national MOET's teacher standards. There are 4,163 primary school teachers in Lao Cai Province, of which 3,159 (75 percent) are female. Among the total primary school teachers in the province, 25 percent are ethnic minorities. The goal of 1.5 teachers per classroom for FDS is not yet achieved. The current ratio for the province is 1.25 teachers per classroom. Hmong language is used as supplemental language of instruction for grade 1 teachers in two districts, including Bac Ha District designated as the focus for this social assessment.

There are four major challenges to FDS implementation in this province: (1) quality of school infrastructure, particularly boarding facilities, kitchens, and student and teacher rest areas; (2) number and quality of available teachers to manage the extended school day; (3) ability to recognize where the system is weak and unable to manage FDS; and (4) limited parent support for FDS.

The Lao Cai Province education leadership identified several major policy issues related to implementing FDS. First, teacher salaries have remained flat, with no increase in salary when moving from half-day to full-day schooling. Teachers lose preparation time, extend their working day, lose time with their families, and gain no additional salary under FDS. In the highlands, because of economic conditions, parental subsidies or support are generally impossible to realize, unlike in the lowland areas. Second, there is no clear policy on boarding schools for primary-age students or adequate funding to provide boarding school facilities. Primary-age boarding schools, particularly for grades 4–5, are seen as important tools to support FDS because of economic and geographic realities in highlands. Boarding schools have helped raise primary school participation, reduce drop-out rates, and raise student achievement levels. Third, mechanisms for subsidizing poor students need refinement. Poor students now receive VND140,000 per student from the Government under the poverty alleviation Program 135. These fees are administered by the commune, and paid to the school. These subsidies are for students if they are poor and live in a poor and disadvantaged area. However, not all poor students may live in poor areas, and there are often very minor differences between those classified as poor and the “near poor” that receive VND20,000 per student.

District BOET. Meetings with the BOET in Bac Ha town narrowed the team’s focus to three communes in Bac Ha District. The district has 21 communes, and 70 percent of the total population is ethnic minorities. Hmong ethnic minorities account for 40 percent of the total population, and nearly all reside in the poorest and more disadvantaged areas. All the communes in Bac Ha District are classified as poor, and participate in Program 135. Only Bac Ha town does not participate in the receipt of P135 program support.

Bac Ha District’s 21 communes include 27 primary schools. In the past four years, all 27 primary schools have moved to implement some form of full-day schooling.

The communes of Lung Phin, Ta Van Chu, and Nam Mon were identified to provide a representative cross-section of communes with many poor and disadvantaged villages, and populated by a mix of the province’s largest ethnic minority groups.

- Lung Phin Commune is in the north central area of the district, approximately 10 km from the district town. The commune population is predominantly ethnic minorities, mainly Phu La, Hmong, and Dao ethnic groups. Hmong villages are among the poorest in the district. Lung Phin Commune has one main primary school and three satellite schools.
- Ta Van Chu Commune is about 20 km north of the district town. Its population is nearly all from the Hmong ethnic group. The commune has one main school and four satellite schools.
- Nam Mon Commune is about 10 km southwest of the district town. Its population is nearly all ethnic minorities, composed of Tay, Nung, Dao, Phu La, and Hmong groups. It has two main primary schools and eight satellite schools.

Each of the three communes’ primary schools has experienced the implementation of FDS over the last 3 years. The district has a strong commitment to FDS, and appears fully behind FDS implementation across all schools. FDS is valued as a mechanism to improve education quality, particularly in improving math and Vietnamese language skills among ethnic minority pupils.

FDS has progressed reasonably well in Bac Ha District. The overall quality of instruction and student progress is regarded as good, particularly in the main primary schools. The quality of teachers and level of students is less strong in the satellite primary schools.

Boarding facilities located at main primary school sites have been a plus, and are an important feature to gain participation from the students from the most remote locations³. Boarding room facilities at these primary schools help ensure participation from grade 4 and 5 students, and occasionally will also include grade 1–3 students, particularly where older siblings are also boarding. Boys and girls participate equally in boarding school at the primary level.

³ In Vietnam, there are two principal mechanisms for the development of boarding schools: i) boarding school supported by the provincial government, and ii) boarding schools supported by parent subsidies at the commune level. The school mentioned here are of the second variety (ii). Facilities were supported at these schools under P135, with furnishings and food contributions coming from parents, principals, and teachers. The school receives VND140,000/child/month from the commune under P135 for the support to poor students that are residing in the boarding schools.



Girls in Grade 4–5 in primary school boarding facility in Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. Boarding facilities help overcome constraints of distance and are proving to boost student attendance and achievement in the highlands. Teachers, principals, and parents have supported boarding room facilities as a mechanism to help boost attendance in full-day schooling, and these facilities aid a teacher's ability to provide additional instruction and homework assistance for ethnic minority students. [photo by Vuong Xuan Tinh]

FDS participation rates differ between the morning and afternoon sessions. In some of the satellite schools, 20–40 percent of the students may not participate in the full day. Student attendance is also influenced heavily by the weather, as non-boarding students' attendance will drop by 20 percent when the weather is cold or rainy. Parents' access to motorbikes to transport children to school or the availability of warm clothes and raincoats have a direct link to attendance. Teachers in the communes often personally support the students with rides or clothing donations.

The number of teachers in Bac Ha District is adequate, but not yet sufficient to achieve the desired goal of 1.5 teachers per classroom for FDS. Ninety percent of the teachers are at Fundamental School Quality Levels (FSQL) standard. As of 2006, the district moved away from the use of contract teachers. In the district, 30 percent of teachers are from ethnic minority groups.

Surveys from the district note a number of perceptions from teachers about FDS. Teachers see real payoff in FDS through greater student achievement. Yet, they have concerns about FDS, notably the lack of incentives (no increased salary), the lack of housing support at school sites, and the trials and tribulations of having to constantly prod parents to be supportive of FDS.

School principals in the district are positive about FDS because they see the benefits of increased class periods per week. The requirements for additional support to students and time spent to engage parents to support FDS are common complaints among the school administrations in the district.

Recent agricultural improvements, new corn and rice seeds, and vocational and extension training are recognized to have played a positive force in improved economic well-being in the district. The district leadership sees improved agricultural productivity playing a positive role in facilitating support for FDS. This perception within the district education leadership emphasizes the close connection between economic status and access to education in poor and disadvantaged areas.

For students, ethnic minority children face unique difficulties in accessing primary education. Distance from schools, limited family means, modest demand for education, and the overall quality of education facilities are all constraints. Hmong families are noted as facing the more pronounced issues as they tend to have lower family income levels, often live in more isolated highland villages in the district, and have

generally weaker Vietnamese language skills than other minority groups. The Hmong students face pressure within their family to miss school more often than other groups in order to contribute labor to support the family's basic needs.

District education leadership cited few differences between girls and boys in their participation in full-day schooling. Participation levels tend to be fairly equal between boys and girls. Girls are typically more focused students, but there are no clear achievement differences noted at the district level. Hmong families may be slightly less supportive of their girls pursuing education, but this constraint is not so visible at the primary grade level.

A number of difficulties with implementing FDS are noted at the district level. Foremost is the issue of the lack of salary incentives for teachers. Pay for HDS and FDS is the same, yet teachers experience a substantial increase in workload, reduced preparation time, and reduced personal time. Teachers have generally endorsed FDS, although they are doing it for the love of the children and without increased salary for increased hours worked.

A second key issue is the school infrastructure. The district has benefited from steady support for new school construction and improvements in main and satellite schools, yet more needs to be done. Main schools are seeing their student populations increase so classroom space could become an issue. Adequate bathroom facilities, rest areas for teachers and students to accommodate the FDS schedule, and space for boarding students are noted as priority needs.

A third issue is the lack of support for poor and near-poor students. The poorest households lack money or time to contribute to the school, or to provide adequate warm clothes and wet weather clothing. Also, there are many "near poor" households that are, in a practical sense, very similar to the poor and disadvantaged in their economic situation, yet do not gain support for poverty reduction.

Finally, the fourth difficulty in implementing FDS is resistance from parents about FDS. Parents in the district were upset initially at the idea of the FDS calendar, citing the lost labor at home to support their family. Primary school-age labor is important support to the family in helping to work the farmland, feed the animals, wash clothes and dishes, and care for preschool-age siblings. District, commune, and school officials have generally cajoled parents into compliance with the FDS schedule expectations after 4–6 months of steady campaigning, and individual consultations.

There are no formal requirements for school fees for books or uniforms. The Government supplies notebooks and textbooks to all students. Students do not wear uniforms. Parent association dues, or other suggested parental contributions to schooling, are determined by individual schools

School Situation Analysis

This section provides a situation analysis to define and interpret the basic state of the environment at the main and satellite primary schools in the three communes visited in Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province.

The four main primary schools visited in Lung Phin, Ta Van Chu, and Nam Mon communes are positive examples of Vietnam's poverty alleviation programs in the last 5 years. Eight to 10 years ago conditions were far worse, as many of these schools did not exist or, where they were present, their size and conditions were inadequate to support quality primary schooling. These schools are now characterized as having generally good infrastructure and facilities, and represent an important step to extending primary school access to ethnic minority students in the Northern highland areas.

In particular, the main primary schools provide a strong infrastructure base for FDS and offer an attractive learning environment for highland students. The main schools typically have individual classrooms for grades 1–5 and a kindergarten classroom. In the three communes visited, the majority of the main schools have boarding room facilities for up to 30–35 boarding students mainly for students in Grades 4 and 5. Boarding school housing was in a separate building from the main school on the main school grounds, and included bunk beds or cots, with a separate room for girls and boys.

The main schools average about 75 students in grades 1–5, including boarding students. Boarding students are both girls and boys, tend to be students from the most distant villages, and come from more-poor families. These boarding students are predominantly drawn from Hmong and Phu La ethnic groups.

A few of the satellite schools have grades 1–5, while most have only grades 1–3. Satellite schools have 3–4 teachers each and one multigrade classroom. Satellite schools typically have 20 students each, and draw students from the nearby villages. Class sizes are small at 5–8 students per class. Most students travel 1–2 km to school by motorbike or walk. Even at the satellite schools, 30–40 percent of the students travel 5–8 km each way to school, often by motorbike, although many also walk to school.

Classrooms have wooden doors, shuttered and gated windows, and tiled floors. Ceramic toilets, electricity, water, simple kitchens, and modest playground climbing facilities are available. Basic maintenance is adequate. Principals' administrative offices have work and meeting spaces, a desktop computer, TV/VCR, telephone, and filing space. In Ta Van Chu Commune, there are no computers or TVs. Teacher classrooms are equipped with good quality desks, textbooks, and supplies, and walls are well-decorated with visual aids. Library rooms with stocked bookshelves of reading books, newspapers, and comic magazines, along with tables and chairs for students are also on-site. Areas for further improvement to support FDS include expanding and improving boarding facilities, a rest area for teachers, an area for students to rest during lunch time, and additional art and visual aid support—particularly for grades 1–2.

The satellite schools visited in the three communes in Bac Ha District provide an important extension of school facilities to the more distant places in the district. Satellite school facilities are modest and functional. The satellite facilities are generally characterized as having block walls, doors, shuttered and gated windows, and tiled floors in classrooms. Most have electricity for the majority of the day, water storage tanks, TV/VCR, a telephone, and a dirt floor cooking space. Ceramic toilets are not generally found, and WC dirt spaces were poorly maintained. Playground or exercise areas are generally not paved, and grounds do not have playground facilities but do include small vegetable plots. Classrooms are equipped with older wooden desks and chairs, or benches. Classroom walls have some visual aids that are typically more modest or show considerable wear-and-tear compared with the main school classrooms. A small set of bookshelves, though not a library, is often available as a source of additional reading materials for the children. A medicine cabinet and cot is often available in a storage area or smaller classroom. Walls are usually not well-kept and generally cleanliness shows room for improvement.

In each of the communes, school participation is nearly 100 percent in these villages, although there are some disabled students (deaf, blind) that do not participate in school. The teacher-to-classroom ratio is barely above 1.1 teachers per classroom. Although many teachers did not complete high school, they generally meet basic MOET standards and have completed summer teacher certification programs. Teachers are predominately Kinh ethnicity, and 10–15 percent of the teachers were ethnic minorities. Hmong and Tay teachers are the most common among the ethnic teachers.

FDS schedules are in operation at all of the schools in the three communes. Schools typically run FDS 3 days per week, from Monday through Wednesday. Thursday mornings are used as instructional time, Thursday afternoons are used as a teacher's planning time, and Fridays have a half day of instruction. Boarding students stay Monday through midday on Friday. Boarders have evening homework sessions with the teacher on duty 4 days a week, which are effectively two additional periods per day.

FDS is reported to have helped considerably in raising student achievement levels. There are now much lower percentages of low-performing primary students, as math and Vietnamese language skills have improved. There are no reported dropouts from the schools, and only 1–3 grade repeaters in the main schools. Girls' and boys' participation in FDS is generally equal, and parental support for girls' and boys' attendance shows no marked difference. Girls tend to be better students. Phu La and Dao ethnic students typically perform better than Hmong students.

Local language skills are often used by the teachers in the classroom. In particular, grade 1 and 2 Hmong teachers often instruct 10–25 percent of the time in the Hmong language. After that, the need for local language skills is reportedly diminished.

Most schools report that their students bring their lunch to school, or return home for lunch during the 11:30 am–1:30 pm break. Where there are boarding facilities, school teachers prepare meals, with occasional support from parents. Schools use vegetable plots on the school grounds to contribute food for meals, and also get contributions of rice from the parent association or from parents of boarding students, where affordable.



Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. Poverty remains a problem in the highlands. The lack of food security for many families, poor child nutrition, and limited access to basic services are most evident among highland, minority populations. Improved targeting of resources to poor areas with large ethnic minority populations will help address the needs of such vulnerable groups and facilitate their children's school attendance. School lunch programs are often cited by teachers and principals as an important area for targeted support and will aid the success of full-day school. [photo by Vuong Xuan Tinh]

Schools receive support for students through poverty reduction programming. For poor students, schools receive VND140,000 per student per month, and VND20,000 per student per month for non-poor students. These funds support basic school operations, including supplies, supplemental food, and clothing for needy students. Additional support for poor children, such as additional teaching aids, food, and clothing, will further support FDS.

Schools all have a parent association. The level of activity varies. The role of the parent association typically is to promote the value of education, and mobilize community support for small tasks for the school. Most common activities include helping to clean the school to open the year, building a border fence, and gathering food or clothing contributions for disadvantaged students. Association membership is most often set at five parents, by selection of both school leadership and the parents. Several associations indicated a requirement that each ethnic group be represented among the five representatives selected to serve in the parent association. The leadership of parent associations met during the field visit was all women, from Dao, Hmong, or Phu La ethnic groups.

Lao Cai Principals on FDS

Individual and group discussions with principals and assistant principals at the primary schools in Lung Phin, Ta Van Chu, and Nam Mon communes are instructive for SEQAP project preparation.

Principals interviewed show consistently high support for FDS. FDS is recognized as a considerable task to implement, and requires additional efforts to support teachers, students, and parents. The district and commune leadership have been very active in support school principals to implement FDS.

In Year 1 of FDS implementation in 2005, 70 percent attendance was reported in the afternoon session, and now, in the main schools, FDS attendance is nearly 95–100 percent. FDS attendance is not as strong in the satellite schools, with most reporting 90–95 percent attendance for the full day, and 60–70 percent attendance on bad weather days like those observed during this social assessment visit.

The first year of implementation was very challenging, because considerable time was invested in campaigns throughout the villages, including extensive house-to-house meetings with the least supportive parents. Commune and village leadership support were recognized as key to winning-over parents. The socialization efforts are a considerable drain on the time of both school administrators and their teachers, as these efforts have continued even after FDS implementation.

Principals note that teachers face many challenges in implementing FDS. Their teaching day is greatly extended, and they sacrifice planning and preparation time and personal time with their families. The teachers are supportive of FDS because of its benefits to the students, but they require additional support. Salary supplements or housing subsidies are noted as important. Principals also indicated the need for additional teaching aids, especially in grades 1–2, where Vietnamese language skills are typically weak for ethnic minority students. Many teachers would benefit from additional training and mentoring to manage the extended teaching day, including improved mechanisms to work with lower performing students and additional activities to deploy. A break room or rest area in school is an important infrastructure need. More funding and facilities support for boarding students is also a high priority for implementing FDS. Several of the schools asked principals and teachers to contribute a small portion of their own salary to supplement poor students.

In these commune schools where there is generally adequate infrastructure, the biggest difficulty in FDS is with the parents. Garnering their support is difficult. While there has been general success in implementing FDS, this progress does not imply there are not continued problems with parents. Probably 20–30 percent of the parents are still not happy with the loss of child labor support for their families. These parents continue to miss their children's help with feeding the animals, caring for younger siblings, and contributing to farm field work. At planting and harvest times, there will be a considerable drop-off in school attendance, particularly in afternoon school attendance. Difficult terrain in these villages is also a contributing factor to parents not sending their children to FDS. Rainy weather makes road passage difficult and mountain streams impassable, and cold or damp conditions discourage attendance because students lack raincoats and warm clothes.



Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. *Many students travel 1 hour or more by foot or motorcycle to attend school. The distance, along with many families' need to rely on their children for farm labor and help with household chores, hinders regular school attendance for children from ethnic minority families.[photo by Myles Elledge]*

Hmong ethnic families tend to be less educated and many parents have very limited Vietnamese language literacy skills. Hmong families are typically more isolated because of the geography of their homes and villages. Principals and teachers also have less interaction with them. It takes more effort to engage these parents, or follow-up with students about their performance or attendance issues.

Principals noted an increased sense of responsibility with FDS, and feel the school has additional accountability to deliver student achievement and earn the continued trust of parents. While many parents used to question the return-on-investment in education, principals now feel they are making progress as student achievement gains are significant, and importantly, are increasingly realized by their families.

Lao Cai Teachers on FDS

Observations on FDS from focus group meetings with teachers in Lung Phin, Ta Van Chu, and Nam Mon communes, as well as the social assessment team's individual conversations, are outlined in this section.

FDS is fully in place in the three communes. Grades 1–2 typically attend 30–32 class periods per week, and grades 3–5, 32–35 periods per week. The teachers teach 4 hours in the morning, and 3 hours in the afternoon Monday through Wednesday, and teach half days for Thursday and Friday. Most schools hold a teachers' meeting on Thursday afternoon, and end at 11:30 am on Friday. Teachers may spend an additional 1 hour a day at school managing group activities or helping with lunch for boarding students. At the main schools where there are boarding facilities, 1–2 teachers will stay overnight with the boarding students, and the daily shifts are rotated among the teachers.

Student attendance under FDS schedule is relatively good. When there are not peak demands for farm labor at home, and the weather is good, attendance is 90–100 percent, depending on the school. The economic conditions of families, geography, and the weather are factors that contribute to less than 100 percent attendance. The social assessment team visits were in cold and very rainy days, and school attendance was down to 50–70 percent in many locations. Teachers reported this pattern as typical during the winter and the rainy season.



Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. *The topography of the highland regions poses many challenges to school attendance. Low population densities, poor roads, impassable streams during rainy season, and lack of warm clothes and rain gear have a negative impact on school attendance in the highlands. [photo by Vuong Xuan Tinh]*

Teachers report receiving limited additional training and advice to manage FDS. Support varies by location and the strength of the school principals. Teachers mostly have exchanged information with each other, and turned to the head teachers for mentoring help to manage FDS. The teachers in these communes consistently requested additional training support to strengthen their ability to provide a variety of lessons and activities to make FDS engaging for the students. The repetition in teaching math and Vietnamese language in the afternoon session was seen as possible, but they felt they needed more help in making these sessions more engaging. The challenge of teaching to varying levels of students in the classroom also is a concern. Teaching aids are particularly needed for grades 1–2, where the ethnic minority students need to learn visually and have more limited Vietnamese language skills.

A majority of the teachers in the main and satellite schools reside in Bac Ha town. Many travel 30–45 km each day, back and forth to town on a daily basis. The teachers report that they have an average income, and nearly all are married with children of their own. Some teachers reported sending their children to live with their parents for schooling. Quite a few teachers are married to other teachers who also work in the Bac Ha District. FDS does place an additional strain on their time, and reduces the time they are home with their own children. Teachers wish for additional compensation, increased salary, or additional housing support to compensate them for the increased workload of FDS.

Teachers are very positive on the impact of FDS. While the transition to FDS is challenging, the good results are shown in greater student achievement. The teachers report that there are more “good” and “very good” students in each classroom, and fewer “poor” performing students. There are very few repeaters in each school, normally only 1–2 students. Phu La and Hmong students make up the majority of the student populations, with some Tay, Dao, and Nung students as well. Hmong students are reported to be weaker students, notably in Vietnamese language skills. Girl and boy students have shown fairly equal participation. Girls with younger siblings may be called upon to assist at home more often than boys to provide childcare. Girls tend to be harder working students, do their homework more consistently, and are typically better behaved.

Most children bring their own lunch, typically of rice. Particularly among the Hmong families, cooked corn rather than rice was the main lunch food, and few lunches included meat or egg for protein. About 50 percent of the students that are 1–2 km from home return to their homes for lunch. Teachers manage the preparation of meals for boarding students at the main schools.

Parental support in the three communes is very limited. The family’s economic status does not allow them to contribute much time or money to their children’s schooling. Teachers often contribute food for boarding students, and collect and distribute extra clothes for students.

Parent relations are the most trying part of FDS implementation. Parents have shown early resistance to FDS, and continue to call on their children’s time to support the family.

The teachers shared comments that parents show limited interest in their children’s school performance. An estimated 50–70 percent of the parents follow their child’s performance closely. They may want to be sure their child is behaving, but typically do not follow achievement in school very closely. Teachers will routinely meet with parents twice or three-times a year to provide performance information. Where the families live close to the school, or the parents are involved in the parent association, there will be more interaction with the teachers. Parents of students with attendance problems and those that chronically do not attend the full day will be pursued with visits by village leaders, principals or by the teachers themselves.

Students normally have 1 or more hours of homework that is often completed. Many Hmong students may not complete their homework. Students in poor families gain little support from their parents with homework. Many Hmong families, and some parents from other ethnic groups, lack formal education and have limited literacy. Students may gain assistance from older siblings with their studies. In most all schools, textbooks and library reading resources are limited to on-site school use, and cannot be taken home. None of the teachers reported spending time or giving instruction with students outside of school.

At some schools, teachers commented that the new curriculum was too hard for many ethnic minority students. A reduced number of periods of instruction may be appropriate for highland areas. The teachers questioned whether some flexibility in the curriculum expectations might be beneficial to student performance and their sense of accomplishment. Similarly, recognition of the demand of the agricultural calendar and patterns of attendance also encourages flexibility in delivering the standard, national

curriculum. The curriculum also includes many lowland or Kinh majority activities,⁴ and more could be done to tailor the curriculum and activities to the culture and natural environment experienced by ethnic minorities.

⁴ One example cited came from a primary student's textbook asked them to write a story of what it is like to look at the sea or ocean, although the task may be difficult to imagine for the child. Nearly all the ethnic minority children have never left their district, or seen the open sea.

Lao Cai Parents on FDS

The perceptions from focus group meetings with parents in Lung Phin, Ta Van Chu, and Nam Mon communes add valuable input for preparing for FDS and the SEQAP program.

Parent group discussions were held in a number of locations: at the home of village leaders, the commune office, and at the school grounds. Several meetings were held in the more remote villages, at the homes of village head persons. Parent meetings typically included 4–6 parents, and brought together mothers and fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers. The parents present in these meetings often had attended some schooling, though few advanced beyond grade 6. A number of parents, and/or their spouses, had no formal education and were not literate in the Vietnamese language. Most parents reported having 2–4 children, and all their children had participated in some primary and secondary schooling.

Parents acknowledged consistent support for their children attending school. Parents recognized school attendance would offer their children the chance for a brighter future, noting that education would help them be effective in the market and open possibilities for them to pursue work other than basic farming.

Many parents acknowledged that FDS was benefiting their children. Their children were happy to be at school, and they thought it would help them. Parents often noted that their family benefited from their child's education as the children could help them understand Vietnamese language TV, and could assist them with math or Vietnamese language in the market.



Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. The study's field visits confirmed that many parents see value in education. For example, ethnic minority parents noted the importance of math and Vietnamese language skills in helping the family conduct business in the market. [photo by Myles Elledge]

Parents reported support for girls and boys attending school, and showed no preference based on gender. Parents felt their children should go as far as possible with their education. If the children were good students, they would be open to them studying in lower secondary and high school. A number of parents noted financial hardships for their children if they were to advance to high school (costs of exams and fees).

The parents interviewed indicated their children did do homework at home, and did occasionally read to them. Parents appeared encouraging of students, and urged them to complete their homework, but few indicated that they had the time or the ability to assist them with the homework. Parents reflected a low level of knowledge of their child's studies or performance.

Parents acknowledged the hard work of teachers and principals. They recognized that FDS was harder for the school to manage. Parents did not share any major complaints about the quality of teacher or principals. Several parents noted the need for improved boarding school facilities and more food for the boarding students.

Parents had a number of complaints about the drain on the family because of the demands of FDS. Common points included that FDS meant that children were not able to help with the planting, weeding, or harvesting; feeding and caring for animals; washing dishes and clothes; or taking care of younger children. Parents indicated village leaders, principals, and teachers had had extensive conversations with them, promoting FDS and urging them to let their children participate. The parents noted their compliance and willingness to go along.

Parents also suggested they would continue to need to have their children not go to school on some days, particularly during planting and harvesting, festivals, and when the weather was bad. Without more income, better roads, or more warm or wet weather clothes for their children, parents would not send their children to school for all of FDS.

Parents in the three communes routinely reported feeding their children breakfast before sending them to school, and most reported sending lunch with their children. Some Hmong parents wished they could provide a better lunch for their child, not just corn⁵ or plain rice. There is some competitive tension, or perhaps embarrassment, about the quality of school lunches poor parents could provide. Parents who lived 1–2 km from the school indicated their children regularly come home for lunch, and they often give them a ride to school by motorbike. Parents liked that their children could return home for lunch, and found it beneficial to have some short-term help with washing clothes or dishes, or caring for siblings.

Parents noted the existence of parent-teacher associations. The social assessment team made particular efforts to meet with parents with, and without, representatives of the parent association present in the group discussions. Most parents not active in the group showed limited familiarity with the association's activities, and a limited number tended to participate. Parents were giving their time and resources where possible. Probably 30–50 percent of the parents interviewed contributed in-kind labor or gave funds to the school.

Fees requested by the school varied by the school. In several locations, parents were asked to pay VND30,000 per child for an emergency health care fund for school children, and VND25,000–30,000 for parent association dues. The women's union, teachers, or other parents often tried to make up the difference for those that could not make contributions.

⁵ Steamed corn known as *men-men* is a staple food among many Hmong families.

Provincial Insights—Kon Tum

Kon Tum Province is located in the central region of the country and borders the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Gia Lai. Kon Tum Province also borders Cambodia and Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Like many highland provinces, Kon Tum is mountainous and heavily forested, and traditional smallholder agriculture is the principal economic activity. Kon Tum has 80 communes, of which the majority are classified as poor disadvantaged communes.

Kon Tum is among the poorer provinces of Vietnam, and is heavily populated by highland ethnic minority groups, including the Ba Na, Brau, Gie-Trieng, Jarai, Ro Mam, and Xo dang. More than 54 percent of the 363,000 people in Kon Tum Province are ethnic minorities.

Primary School Pupils, Kon Tum Province

Province	Total Primary Pupils	Total Ethnic Minority Primary Pupils	% Ethnic Minority Primary Pupils
Kon Tum	50,879	33,422	66%

Vietnam General Statistical Office (2007)

Kon Tum

Following the methodology of the social assessment, the study team initiated its work in Kon Tum province by meeting with stakeholders in the provincial level MOET. The key points from the provincial-level discussion are noted here.

There are 128 primary schools in Kon Tum Provinces, and 99 are implementing full-day schooling. Some of the schools are all FDS, and others are a mix of full-day and half-day schedules.

The province education leadership worked with district and commune officials to promote and encourage full-day schooling. The provincial education leadership sees FDS as an important mechanism to improve participation and achievement for ethnic minority students. Where it is being applied, it is showing benefits. The province would like to see clearer national guidelines for FDS on optimal requirements for facilities, number of teachers, teacher skills, among others.

In Kon Tum Province, the implementation of FDS has been delegated to the commune and school level. Implementation varies across communes. Though unintended, the mix of HDS and FDS creates imbalances among schools and students in the province. In Ngoc Hoi district where the team visited, there are a mix of schools implementing FDS, a blend of FDS and HDS, and all still in HDS.

Individual schools, principals, and their teachers have delegated authority to determine the best structure to execute the extended day and how to organize the delivery of the curriculum. Across the province, periods per week have ranged from 30 to 35 under FDS. FDS so far has used a 5-day per week structure. Additional time has been focused primarily on supplemental afternoon lessons in math and Vietnamese language.

Teacher quality in Kon Tum is regarded as fair by the Provincial MOET, and most teachers meet the national MOET’s teacher standards. There are 2,735 primary school teachers in Kon Tum province, of which 2,235 are female. Among the total primary school teachers in the province 21% are ethnic minorities. The goal of 1.5 teachers per classroom for FDS is not yet achieved, as 1.16 teachers / classroom is now the average. The current ratio for the province is 1.2 teachers per classroom. Contract teachers have been used to help manage FDS in some communes. Xo dang language is used as

supplemental language of instruction for grade 1 teachers in a few locations, using teacher assistants under the Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children (PEDC) project.

There are four major challenges to FDS implementation in this province: (1) quality of school infrastructure, particularly boarding facilities, kitchens, and student and teacher rest areas; (2) number and quality of available teachers to manage the extended school day; (3) unclear national guidelines on when to implement FDS, and how best to manage FDS; and (4) limited parent support for FDS.

District BOET. Meetings with the BOET in Ngoc Hoi District town confirmed the team's focus on three communes in the district. In Ngoc Hoi District there is 1 town and 7 communes, and 70% of the population is ethnic minorities. Xo dang, Gie-Trieng, Ba Na belong to indigenous ethnic groups, and nearly all reside in poorest and most disadvantaged areas. All the communes in Ngoc Hoi District are classified as poor, and participate in Program 135, only Ngoc Hoi town does not receive P135 support.

The communes of Dakxu, Daknong, and Dakang were identified to provide a representative cross-section of communes with many poor and disadvantaged villages, and populated by a mix of the province's largest ethnic minority groups.

- Dakxu Commune is located in the north central area of the commune, about 10km from the district town. The commune's population is predominantly ethnic minorities (94%), mainly Xo dang, Muong, Thai, and Nung ethnic groups. Access to land is quite constrained, and many minorities work as hired labor and do not own land. The commune has one main primary school and two satellite schools.
- Daknong Commune is 3km northeast of the district town, along the Lao border. The commune's population is mainly Xo dang, Gie-Trieng, Brau, and Kdong indigenous ethnic groups, and Tay, Thai, Nung and Muong as migrant ethnic groups. The commune has one main school and three satellite schools.
- Dakang Commune is about 30km north of the district town. The commune's population is nearly all ethnic minorities, composed of Xo dang, Gie-Trieng, Ho Lang and Ba Na ethnic groups, and is among the poorer communes in Kon Tum. It has two main primary school and three satellite schools.

There are 12 primary schools in Ngoc Hoi District with a mix of FDS and HDS implementation. The experience with FDS varies across these three communes' primary schools. Dakxu commune has a mix of FDS and HDS in 1 school, Daknong is implementing FDS, and Dakang is applying HDS. The district is committed to moving toward full FDS in a step-by-step process.

FDS participation rates do not differ between the morning and afternoon sessions. This holds true in both the main and satellite schools. FDS is being applied in Ngoc Hoi District on a full-day schedule, Monday through Friday.

The number of teachers in Ngoc Hoi District is adequate at 1.2 teachers / classroom, but not yet sufficient to achieve the desired goal of 1.5 teachers per classroom for FDS. The teacher-to-classroom ratio is not sufficient for FDS. 80 percent of the teachers are at FSQL standard. In the district, 5 percent of the total teachers are from ethnic minority groups.

The district notes a number of perceptions from teachers about FDS. Teachers see real payoff in FDS through greater student achievement. Teachers are challenged to manage the full day of instruction, and wish for further guidance and support in how best to manage their classrooms. Teachers also have faced

difficulties adjusting their planning schedules. Teachers spend considerable time to encourage students and parents to participate in FDS.

School principals in the district are positive about FDS because they see the benefits of increased class periods per week. The need to hold monthly meetings with parents to promote school attendance and collect parent contributions to FDS is an additional burden that school administrators noted in Daknong.

For students, travel distances, limited family means, economic conditions and modest demand for education within their families are all constraints. Some students also felt that afternoon sessions were not very interesting, because they tended to repeat morning exercises. Xo dang families across the district are particularly poor, parents are not very literate, and show limited support for education. Vietnamese language skills among Xo dang in Dakang are particularly weak. The students from families in Dakang are under heavy pressure to work at home, either in the fields or helping to care for a number of siblings.

District education leadership did not see real differences among girls and boys in their participation in school, or in full-day schooling where it is applied. Many Xo dang families often have 5–10 children, so there is some pressure within the families to call upon girls, more than boys, to help to care for siblings.

The key difficulties with implementing FDS are noted at the district-level to be the school infrastructure, the availability of teachers, and the need to push parents to have their children participate. Support for school lunches and boarding facilities for Grade 4 and 5 were also noted as additional support mechanisms that will facilitate FDS.

School Situation Analysis

This section provides a situation analysis to define and interpret the basic state of the environment at the main and satellite primary schools in Kon Tum Province.

The main primary schools visited in Dakxu, Daknong, and Dakang communes are illustrative of the challenges Vietnam faces in improving education access and poverty alleviation. Poverty alleviation programming in the past 5 years is making a difference, but much remains to be done. These main primary schools have been built or renovated in the past 5 years, and are characterized as generally adequate infrastructure and facilities. The presence of these facilities represents an important step to extending primary school access to ethnic minority students in the highland areas.

The main schools typically have individual classrooms for grades 1–5. The main schools have kindergarten classrooms, but these are separate from the main school grounds and tend to be of lower quality infrastructure. In the three communes visited, none of the schools had primary student boarding facilities. The main schools average student population varies: Dakang has 194 students, Dak Nong has 281 students, and Dak XU has 532 students. Children travel 1–2 km to reach school, with some traveling 7–9 km to school. Students either walk or commute by motorbike. In Daknong, the number of classrooms did not facilitate FDS, because FDS operated in the afternoon by sharing classroom facilities with the lower secondary school, forcing primary school classes to consolidate within the primary grades, and shift to a multigrade afternoon session.

The satellite primary schools in these communes have grades 1–3. Satellite schools have 3–4 teachers each, and typically operate multigrade classrooms. Satellite schools have 60–75 students each including 2–4 classrooms, and draw students from the nearby villages. Class sizes average 20–25 students per class. Most students travel 1–2 km to school by motorbike or walk. Traveling distances of 5–8 km for children is not uncommon for students in satellite primary schools.

Classrooms have wooden doors, shuttered and gated windows, and tiled floors. Toilets, electricity, and simple playground climbing facilities are available. Potable water is not always available. Basic maintenance is adequate. Principals' administrative offices have work and meeting spaces, a desktop computer, TV/VCR, telephone, and filing space. Teacher classrooms are equipped with desks and chairs, textbooks, and supplies, and walls are decorated with visual aids. Library rooms hold reading books and a few tables and chairs. To support FDS, improvements in the number of classrooms, a planning or rest area for teachers, an area for students to rest during lunch time, and additional art and visual aid support—particularly for grades 1–2—are noted as important.

The satellite schools visited in the three communes in Ngoc Hoi District are of a lower quality than the main school facilities. Their presence is an important link to extending school access to more remote locations. The facilities are very modest. The satellite facilities are generally characterized as having block walls, doors, shuttered and gated windows, and simple flooring in classrooms. Most have electricity for the majority of the day, lacked water storage tanks, and had a TV/VCR and a telephone. Playground areas are dirt, not paved.

In each of the communes, school participation is nearly 95–100 percent in these villages. The teacher-to-classroom ratios range from 1.0 to 1.3 teachers per classroom. In Daknong Commune, there are 1.2 teachers per class with the FDS implementation. The majority of teachers generally meet basic MOET FSQ standards. Many teachers (Dakxu and Daknong) have less than a high school diploma, and were trained through in-service teacher certification programs. Teachers are predominately Kinh ethnicity, and 5 percent of the teachers are ethnic minorities.

FDS schedules are operational for all classes in Daknong Commune and partially in Dakxu Commune. Schools typically run FDS 5 days per week, Monday through Friday.

FDS is reported to have helped considerably in raising student achievement levels. There are now much lower percentages of low performing primary students, as math and Vietnamese language skills have improved. Girls' and boys' participation in FDS is generally equal, and parental support for girls' and boys' attendance shows no marked difference. Ethnic group differences are observed, with indigenous Xo dang students generally performing at a lower level. Ethnic minorities, such as the Nung and Muong that have migrated from the Northern Highlands to Kon Tum, reportedly have higher levels of achievement.

Language constraints are a significant issue in Kon Tum. Local language skills are useful for teaching in the classroom, but most teachers do not speak local ethnic languages. There are a few teaching assistants in the commune that supporting teaching for the Xo dang, under support of the PEDC project.

Most schools reported that their students return home for lunch during the 11:30 am–1:30 pm break. Some students bring their lunch. Several of the schools are along busy roads, and parents worry about their child's safety during the extensive travel to and from school.

Kon Tum Principals on FDS

Individual and group discussions with principals and assistant principals at the primary schools in Dakxu, Daknong, and Dakang communes are instructive for SEQAP project preparation.

Principals interviewed recognize the value of implementing FDS. FDS is a valuable strategy to help ethnic minority students improve their math and Vietnamese language skills.

In Daknong, FDS implementation began in 2007–08. Attendance was reported in the afternoon, and now, in the main schools FDS attendance is nearly 95–100 percent. FDS attendance is not as strong in the satellite schools, with most reporting 90–95 percent attendance for the full day, and 70 percent attendance during the rainy season.

The first year of implementation was very challenging, because considerable time was invested in campaigns throughout the villages, including extensive house-to-house meetings with the least supportive parents.

Principals note that teachers face many challenges in implementing FDS. Their teaching day is greatly extended, and they experience reduced time for class preparation yet the workload is extended. Teachers are supportive of FDS because of its benefits to the students, but they require additional support. Salary supplements or housing subsidies are noted as important. Principals also indicated the need for additional teaching aids, especially in grades 1–2, where Vietnamese language skills are typically weak for ethnic minority students. Many teachers operating under FDS have not received any substantial or additional training to manage the extended teaching day. Teachers in Dakang often visited student’s families to encourage their participation in school, but often encounter communication challenges due to the parent’s limited Vietnamese language skills and the teacher’s lack of knowledge of local languages.

School infrastructure, its capacity, and overall condition are key concerns for principals. Class sizes are large and total space available does not facilitate FDS. The afternoon sessions are shared with the lower secondary school in one school in Daknang, and this forces the primary school to shift to multigrade teaching for the afternoon FDS sessions. Obtaining the support of parents is also difficult. It takes time, and principals recognize the real economic limitations—especially with many of the Xo dang families. Parents in Dakxu and Dakang communes rely heavily on their children’s labor to support their families.

Ethnic Xo dang families tend to be less educated and many parents have very limited Vietnamese language literacy skills. Principals and teachers also have less interaction with them. It takes more effort to engage these parents because their Vietnamese language skills are quite limited. It takes effort to encourage students about performance or attendance issues.



Ngoc Boi District, Kon Tum Province. High rates of illiteracy among parents, limited Vietnamese language skills, and limited time to be engaged with their children's school define some of the constraints to parent and school communications in the highland areas. Community involvement and parental engagement are important issues to realize effective full-day schooling implementation, and student achievement.[photo by Nguyen Phuong Hong]

Kon Tum Teachers on FDS

Observations on FDS from focus group meetings with teachers in Dakxu, Daknong, and Dakang, as well as the social assessment team's individual conversations, are outlined in this section.

FDS is fully in place in Daknong Commune. Grades 1–2 typically do 30–32 periods per week, and grades 3–5, 32–35 periods/week. The teachers teach 4 hours in the morning, and 3 hours in the afternoon Monday through Friday. Dakxu, where FDS is applied, is also following a similar schedule.

Student attendance under FDS is good. When there are not peak demands for farm labor at home, and the weather is good, attendance is 90–100 percent, depending on the school. The economic conditions of families, geography, and the weather contribute to less than 100 percent attendance. During harvest time and the rainy season, attendance drops moderately.

Teachers report receiving very limited additional training and advice to manage FDS. The challenge of teaching to varying levels of students in the classroom also is a concern. Teachers also feel that they need help to develop new activities for the afternoon sessions, to make these repetitive math and Vietnamese language sessions more interesting to the students. Limited classroom and planning space, poor toilets, and lack of water are also noted constraints in the school infrastructure, and are noted as issues to the success of FDS.



Teachers gather in Ngoc Boi District, Kon Tum Province. Highland populations have more limited access to education than populations in the lowland. Where primary education is available, it is generally of poorer quality. The low education level among parents, the more limited supply of teachers, and lower levels of teacher qualifications create a challenging environment for school achievement. [photo by Nguyen Phuong Hong]

A majority of the teachers in the main and satellite schools in Daknong and Dakxu communes commute from home to their schools. A limited number of teachers live in the immediate communities in which they teach and reported having average family incomes. Teachers in Dakang are provided with on-site housing since their homes are very far from the school.

Teachers are positive on the impact of FDS. While the transition to FDS is challenging, the good results are shown in greater student achievement. They have more good performing students, and the additional time helps them to work more with the weaker performing students.

Most children bring their own lunch, typically of rice. Xo dang and other very poor children are somewhat embarrassed by the quality of their lunches. Overall nutrition is a concern, as many children lack many vegetables or much protein in their diets. Personal hygiene is also a problem for many of the poorest students.

Parental activity with the schools in the three communes is very limited. The family's economic status and their low level of education do not facilitate their contributions of time to the school. Low literacy rates, and the distance between homes and school, prevent teachers from having much interaction with their students' parents, especially with ethnic Xo dang families.

The teachers shared comments that parents show limited interest in their children's performance. Many parents are too busy, work fields in distance locations, and have not had much education themselves.

Students normally have 1 or more hours of homework, and it is completed more often than not. None of the teachers reported spending time or giving instruction with students outside of school.

At some schools, teachers commented that the new curriculum was too hard for many ethnic minority students. A reduced number of periods of instruction for ethnic minority students seems more practical. The teachers questioned whether some flexibility in curriculum expectations might be beneficial to student performance and their sense of accomplishment.

Kon Tum Parents on FDS

The perceptions from focus group meetings with parents in Dakxu, Daknong, and Dakang communes add valuable input for preparing for FDS and the SEQAP program.

Parent group discussions were held in homes and in schools. The parents present in these meetings often had attended some schooling, though few advanced beyond grade 4–6. A number of parents, and/or their spouses, had no formal education and were not literate in the Vietnamese language. Most parents reported having 4–10 children, and all their children had participated in some primary and secondary schooling.

Parents acknowledged support for their children attending school and generally were willing to comply with the commune leadership's request for FDS. Parents appreciated the extended day because they knew where their children would be and that their children would be safe.

Parents reported that they often used their local ethnic language in the home. Vietnamese language skills were limited among many Xo dang parents.

Parents reported support for girls and boys attending school, and showed no preference based on gender. Parents felt their children should go as far as possible with their education.

The parents interviewed indicated their children did do homework at home. Parents encouraged their children to do well in school, and behave. Parents reflected a low level of knowledge of their child's studies or their performance.

Parents acknowledged the hard work of teachers and principals. They recognized that FDS was harder for the school to manage. Parents did not share many complaints about the quality of teachers or principals. Several parents noted the need for snacks and lunches for their children.

The main issues for parents with regard to FDS were the time demands and the lost labor for the family. They missed their child's help with farming and caring for other children. This observation was most common in Dakxu and Dakang communes. The payment of the parent contribution was a challenge for many families.

Parents in the three communes did not always feed their children breakfast before they sent them to school. Some students took their lunch to school. Most who lived 1–2 km away from school would return home during the noon lunch break, and their parents would feed them lunch.

Fees requested by the school varied by the school. In Daknong Commune, each pupil had to pay VND 40,000 per month to support teachers under FDS. Typically, a monthly commune meeting is called to discuss schooling and to collect the monthly fees. Parents reported that 100 percent of the families paid the monthly fees. In Dakxu Commune, parents are asked to contribute VND 30,000. In Dakang commune, parents are asked to collect VND 20,000 per month

Differences Observed Across the Two Provinces

This section reviews a range of differences that were observed between the two provinces, as related to FDS.

In Lao Cai, the primary boarding schools at the main schools in Bac Ha District provided on-site housing for a significant portion of the primary students attending the school. In Kon Tum, among the communes visited, there were no primary boarding schools. Leadership in Lao Cai recognized the important role of primary boarding schools played in boosting attendance for, facilitating sustained instruction for, and providing extra assistance to students in grades 4 and 5. Students also reported finding the boarding facilities enjoyable, often offering better living conditions than they experienced at home. The District and Communes in Lao Cai had taken the initiative to develop boarding facilities, and parents had contributed basic bedding and often staple foods.

The presence of satellite schools also varied across the communes visited in the two provinces. Lao Cai had more satellite schools per main school than Kon Tum. Class sizes in Lao Cai satellite schools were smaller, and the students' ethnic makeup tended to be more concentrated to 1–2 ethnic groups. Less investment in school facilities in the Central Highlands might explain the difference. In both provinces, satellite schools were an important asset to extending school access to more remote villages. In both provinces, satellite schools tended to be less attractive facilities than main schools.

In Kon Tum, observations about the poor quality of school infrastructure were frequently noted. The availability of classroom space was a constraint to FDS in Kon Tum. Schools with HDS had to share space during part of the day with lower secondary schools. The limited number of classes in Kon Tum also led primary sessions in the morning, and secondary sessions use the same facilities in the afternoon. Class sizes also were larger in Kon Tum, although teacher-to-classroom ratios were similar between the two provinces, making the management of the classrooms more difficult, especially in the FDS environment. Many schools lacked adequate toilets and water as well. No primary schools had boarding facilities.

The benefits of FDS were recognized in both provinces. More instructional time, additional time with lower achieving students, and more rapid learning were common benefits reported in interviews. In addition, in Kon Tum, parents felt comforted to know where their children were during the day. They also liked the improved safety because their children would be less likely to be playing along busy roads (less risk of traffic injuries) and around water (reduced risk of drowning) when they were in school.

Overall, there were more absences per day in Kon Tum than in Lao Cai in HDS and FDS. FDS afternoon attendance varied across the two provinces. In Lao Cai, FDS was in place in all locations visited. Attendance in the afternoon session typically showed reduced attendance, perhaps down 10–30 percent from the morning session, depending on the season and the weather. In Kon Tum, FDS attendance was consistent between the morning and afternoon sessions, with very little reduction in the afternoon participation rates.

The structure of FDS also varied across the two provinces. In Lao Cai, Bac Ha District, FDS was typically implemented with 3 full days (M–W), and 2 half days (Th–Fri). In Kon Tum, where FDS was implemented in Ngoc Hoi District, the schools followed a 5-day/week schedule. This flexibility at the commune and school level is an important, positive feature to support FDS implementation.

Parent contributions to the schools were also a noted difference among provinces. In Kon Tum, Daknong Commune, where FDS was implemented, parents routinely contributed VND30,000 per month per child to support the school and the teachers manage FDS. A monthly meeting was held to review school issues, and collect parent contributions. There was an explicit link between the parent contributions and FDS. In

Lao Cai's Bac Ha District, parent contributions to the school were far more limited. Compliance with requests for contribution of VND20,000–40,000 per child per month was low (30–50 percent), and there was no link between contributions and FDS. Teachers did not receive any additional subsidy or support for full-day teaching in the Lao Cai communes visited.

Differences among ethnic minority group attendance and performance was also observed. In both provinces the poorer ethnic groups showed weaker school attendance. In Lao Cai, Hmong families tended to be poorer and their students more likely to be absent due to family labor needs. Hmong girls were more likely to be needed to help with siblings, and had slightly less parental support for their regular attendance. In Kon Tum Province, Xo dang families typically were more likely to be poor than other minority groups in the province, and also more likely to miss school. Girls from Xo dang families were more likely to miss school than boys. Also, ethnic minority groups from the North that had migrated to Kon Tum showed higher rates of attendance and better performance (which is closely linked to their parents' higher levels of literacy) than indigenous ethnic groups to the region (e.g., Xo dang).

Findings

This chapter outlines the key issues for SEQAP project planners coming out of the social assessment in the provinces of Lao Cai and Kon Tum.

First, the constraints to education access are reviewed. These are not new, but are important to keep in focus.

Second, this section outlines eight categories of measures that may be relevant to incorporate in the SEQAP project design.

Third, the section touches on a few policy implications. Detailed policy analysis is outside the scope of this social assessment, however, the social assessment team observed several important points that may have a bearing on the SEQAP policy framework.

Constraints to Access

Ethnic minorities in the highlands areas of Vietnam often receive lower-quality services in education compared to the national norm, and encounter numerous barriers to using education services. Ethnic minority families often have significantly lower health and education status than the national average. These elements all pose challenges to improved education quality.

Throughout the highlands, there are multiple barriers and constraints. Many of these barriers apply equally to ethnic minorities and other populations, whereas others are likely to be more severe for ethnic minorities.

The use of social services, such as education, is ultimately a household decision. The decision to access education is influenced by the cost of the service, family income, and the expected benefit from the service. Factors such as distance, monetary cost, and subsidies affect the cost and choices. Many families simply are unwilling to consistently send their children to a school that is an hour or more away, when it effectively reduces the children's capacity to work at home and creates a serious opportunity cost. The monetary costs—e.g., cost of travel to school, school expenses, clothes, and food for lunch also can obstruct access given the low incomes that ethnic minorities earn in the highlands.

In addition to considering the cost of services, households also must consider the value of the education services that they are using. If educational facilities or services are of poor quality, they will be less likely to be used, regardless of the cost. Ethnic minorities may be especially sensitive to considerations of quality or appropriateness. Language barriers make it difficult for their children to take full advantage of the school system, lowering its perceived value. The delivery systems and curriculum developed by the majority is not always sensitive to the beliefs or cultural practices of ethnic minority parents and students.

The following table summarizes key constraints to access. While this information is not entirely new, as many studies and data sets have made these points, this social assessment confirms the following constraints are observed in both Lao Cai and Kon Tum provinces.

Constraint	Description
Physical/Geographic Constraints	Ethnic minorities live in rough terrain in the highlands. The physical geography of these areas is a real challenge, and the remote locations increase the costs to provide and maintain infrastructure and education services. Travel distances and the terrain, particularly in rainy weather, make it difficult for students and teachers to reach their schools.
Economic Constraints	Ethnic minority groups face severe economic constraints, including their isolation from markets, small-scale agricultural activities, and low incomes. Families living in poverty will weigh the opportunity and direct costs of accessing education against the expected benefits. Trade-offs between sending children to school and keeping them at home to work the land or help with household chores are occurring in the highlands.
Fiscal Constraints	On the supply side, competing demands on limited funds results in communities with not as many schools, greater distances between the available schools, fewer teachers and teaching aids, and poorer quality infrastructure. Constraints on the availability of subsidies and funding formulas based on per pupil numbers pose challenges for raising the level of poorer school facilities.
Lack of Understanding	Ethnic minority families come from different cultures than most education service providers, often have lower educational standing, face high rates of illiteracy, and may have less knowledge and understanding of education and its long-term benefits. Difficulties in communicating with teachers and principals also represent constraints to education quality and achievement.
Competing Cultural Systems	Central and standardized interventions and delivery mechanisms often struggle to acknowledge and appreciate traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices. In turn, minority groups can be skeptical of services that challenge traditional knowledge and practices. They may view schools that discourage children from using local languages and curriculum activities that draw mainly from majority cultural examples as awkward or even as threats to their ethnic identity and welfare.
Poor Quality Services	Services that are of a lower quality are more likely to be perceived as less relevant. Highland school buildings are often not up to national standards, teachers are less qualified, and visual aids are limited. Lower quality services are a disincentive for school participation, and may impede the pace of student achievement and reduce the parent's perceived value of school attendance.
Gender and Ethnic Group Considerations	Cultural values and behavior patterns are almost universally colored by gender and influenced by ethnicity. These values and distinctions, in turn, create gender-specific or ethnic group patterns in demand for and acceptance of education achievement. Differences may appear in the primary grades, but are more pronounced at higher grade levels. Real and perceived utility and opportunity costs of the services may exist, and these may differ by gender and ethnic group. Poverty and income status can also compound these differences.
Language	National language policy requires the national language as the language of instruction, and learning Vietnamese offers long-term economic benefits for many. Vietnam has taken important steps to encourage the use of ethnic languages in schools, and this flexibility is recognized as valuable. Teachers, parents, and students often see value in local language support in early grades

Constraint	Description
	<p>of primary school to facilitate learning. Local language teaching is limited in availability, because there are few minority teachers or principals, and training for teachers in local language is only in the pilot stages.</p> <p>Limited literacy or Vietnamese language skills limited parents' ability to help their children study at home. It also poses a constraint on parents' ability to interact with principals and teachers. Where teachers do speak the language of the community they work in, outreach, communication, and ultimately effective assistance to parents and students reduces constraints.</p>

Implications for SEQAP Planning

There are a number of challenges to overcome to realize the success of FDS in the highland areas. Based on this social assessment of two provinces, the important challenges include

- developing measures that help overcome problems with geography, distance, and family income. Basic needs are real constraints and call for support
- expanding the number of teachers and their skills, support, and placement
- providing allowances and incentives to teachers implementing FDS
- improving infrastructure, including adding more and better classrooms, satellite schools, primary boarding facilities, kindergartens, and planning and rest areas in schools
- enhancing teaching aids by making more available, particularly for grades 1–2
- facilitating flexible delivery mechanisms to recognize ethnic culture and that work around farm labor demands
- focusing on achievement as the push for participation proceeds

The following section outlines eight categories of recommendations for SEQAP project planners to aim to incorporate in the project design. The issues to be addressed are listed in order of importance, as observed by the social assessment team.

1. Incentives to Boost Demand

- Provide allowances and subsidies for poor students and their families that will help overcome economic and geographic constraints. In the communes visited, low income levels, the lack of basic necessities, and the hardships of the long commutes to school are leading constraints to school participation among ethnic minorities. Support mechanisms that fund school lunches (improve nutrition), support the purchase of warm clothes and raincoats, fund primary boarding students in grades 4–5, and provide transportation to and from school are all important ways to facilitate parental support for FDS and support regular class attendance.
- Additional support for the “near poor” students is also recognized as important. There is a large gap between the support schools receive from communes for poor students (VND140,000 per student per month) versus the amount for non-poor students (VND20,000 per student per month). Yet, the practical reality is that is not much difference between the income level and household conditions among students classified as poor and “near poor”.

2. Teachers

- Revise regulations to provide increased earnings for increased hours worked in FDS. The shift from HDS to FDS has not come with pay or housing subsidy adjustments. In most of the communes visited, teachers operating under FDS schedules do not receive any additional incentives for working longer hours, and dealing with increased challenges of the FDS. A reliance on parental contributions is not realistic in the highland areas.

- Expand training and mentoring opportunities to improve teacher’s abilities to manage FDS. In the locations visited, teachers report very little professional guidance on how best to adjust to FDS. The teachers noted the need to gain help in offering more variety in their lessons, especially for the afternoon sessions, on how to teach students with varying abilities and ways to adjust curriculum lessons to the skills and culture of different ethnic minority groups.
- Increase numbers of teachers to meet class ratio goals and ease the teaching load for teachers in FDS. Many of the schools visited did not have enough teachers to meet the 1.5 teachers per classroom goal for FDS. The presence of a “floating” teacher to provide supplemental support or the ability of principals to cover some lessons are mechanisms to increase teaching resources in highland schools with fewer resources.

3. Parent Participation

- Support parents’ associations and focus their activities on strengthening the quality of the school environment. Parent associations do require time commitments from parents and these are not always possible in low income communities. However, where available, they represent resources that could be used to enhance school environments.



Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. Parent-School Committees, while small, are representative of the ethnic diversity in the highlands. In Bac Ha District, membership guidelines ensure parent representation from each ethnic minority group. Such steps promote cultural understanding and participation across village communities. These steps are helpful because a small percentage of school administrators and teachers are ethnic minorities. [photo by Myles Elledge]

- Strengthen links between parents and teachers through clear guidelines and expectations. Communes and schools do not have very clear guidelines on parent and teacher roles and responsibilities. With the transition to FDS and the increased importance of parental support to realize FDS, clear expectations will help facilitate the transition to FDS.
- Promote parents’ participation in school councils to realize the parents’ full potential. School councils are a fairly new initiative in Vietnam’s primary schools. Their realization, where parents have time to contribute, will be an additional asset for FDS implementation.

4. Expand Access

- Improve access to services to ensure ethnic minority coverage and participation. In the communes visited as part of this social assessment, main and satellite schools were in adequate condition. More could still be done to increase the number of classrooms in places like Kon Tum, and continue to expand satellite school into village clusters that lack close proximity to school.
- Invest in facilities and support services to reach ethnic minority populations. Better facilities will make a difference in FDS implementation. In many locations, like those visited, new structures are not a top priority, but rehabilitation of satellite schools will close the gap between the quality of main and satellite schools. The addition of selected facilities, such as kitchen or cooking areas, work and rest areas for teachers, rest areas for students for the lunch break, and improved toilet and drinking water facilities, will make FDS manageable.
- Support FDS in the highlands by providing resources that support expanded access. The presence of kindergartens was observed as important to reducing labor needs at home. Parents noted the importance of older siblings' time at home as helpful to the economic activities of their household. If younger siblings have kindergarten as an option, there is less need for the older siblings to care for the younger siblings, allowing the older children the flexibility to potentially attend school. Also, primary school boarding facilities for grades 4 and 5 were prized for their ability to facilitate attendance for the most distant and poor students. Boarding facilities also helped with student achievement because students had more time for instruction and more guidance with homework during the evening hours.



Bac Ha District, Lao Cai Province. Household and agricultural chores place a high demand on children's time, and these responsibilities often prevent and reduce school attendance. Care of younger siblings is often noted by parents as a reason to keep their older children out of school. The increasing availability of kindergarten classes helps reduce the childcare burden in many homes, frees older siblings to attend school, and facilitates school readiness for children participating in kindergarten. [photo by Vuong Xuan Tinh]

5. Institutional Support

- Encourage awareness and focus by ensuring there are advocates in communities and support for school leadership and teachers. Support systems are noted as invaluable to socializing the community to accept FDS. FDS requires an on-going process to sustain interest in the importance of education and gain the participation of the poorest families. The active support

of district, commune, and village leaders, as well as principals and teachers, is critical to the communication needs around FDS.

6. Language

- Provide multi-language programming to expand acceptance and impact of education. E.g., Xo dang and Hmong language training support has a positive impact in Kindergarten through grade 2. Support mechanisms, such as the availability of local language skills among principal and teachers, helps with classroom instruction, and the ability to garner the support of families that may have limited language skills in Vietnamese.

7. Recruitment of Ethnic Minority Providers

- Introduce affirmative action-like programs to recruit ethnic minority teachers and assistants. Ethnic minority students that advance in the educational system often require additional support to pursue high school or advanced training. Support to facilitate their training as teachers, teaching assistants, and principals will make higher learning opportunities possible for those that can not afford it on their own.
- Support incentives for scholarships, training, and participation in planning programs, and localize service providers to facilitate FDS. Principals, teachers and teaching assistants that are from ethnic minority groups will help tailor school plans to local conditions, and they are more likely to reside closer to their families in highland villages.
- This development of role models does matter to encouraging younger students to attend school and perform. The presence of more ethnic minority education leaders will also provide the benefits of program tailoring, and will likely serve to reduce cultural and language barriers.

8. Strengthen Cultural Understanding

- Encourage understanding and appreciation for ethnic and cultural diversity. Many service providers are not ethnic minorities, and do not have full appreciation for the culture and practices of the parents and students that they serve. Improved orientation and training to understand cultural diversity will facilitate tailored services that better meet the demands of ethnic minority communities.
- Expand education on ethnicity and culture in school activities. Include minority cultures in supplemental resources and extracurricular activities. Adjustments in pedagogical instructions to incorporate more ethnic minority cultural representation will appeal to highland parents and students, and make learning more comfortable for them.

Policy Implications

1. Vietnam has successfully developed a series of policies and programs to support infrastructure and other development activities in poor and ethnic minority areas. These are model programs for many countries in the regions facing similar challenges. These programs include the National Target Program for Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction (HEPR, or Program 134). Another program, the Program for Socio-Economic Development in Communes faced with Extreme Difficulties (PDCED for short, also known as Program 135), has focused on poverty reduction in the poorest regions of Vietnam since 1985.

This social assessment solicited perceptions from village-level stakeholders. Principals, commune leaders, and teachers commented on the needs of the near-poor, referring to those families that are quite impoverished but do not qualify for support under P135. For example, schools received VND140,000 per child per month for poor children, yet received only VND20,000 per child per month for other children. Field observations suggest the need to close the gap between these two forms of support and boost support for near-poor students.

2. Provide incentives to teachers with bilingual skills and teaching responsibilities. MOET has facilitated the teaching of local languages to ease early grade learning. The Committee for Ethnic Minorities (CEM) support initiatives to train teachers in local ethnic languages, particularly for kindergarten through Grade 2. These steps are recognized as important and valued at the commune level.

Teachers indicated they would have greater interest in boosting their language capacities if these expanded skills also earned them additional incentives or compensation. Teachers with ethnic language skills, or those that participate in the CEM training programs, do not formally gain a new credential that earns them a higher rank of pay.

3. Revise incentives for teachers based on hours worked in FDS. Teachers are required to teach about 20–23 hours per week and perform an additional under 2 hours of extracurricular activities. Teachers who have recently transitioned to full-day schooling, at least in the highlands, now are teaching 30–35 periods per week. However, they have not experienced any pay adjustment based on the increased hours worked. Provincial DOET and District BOET leadership, principals, and teachers at the school level all urged for an adjustment to the pay system. Teachers will benefit from the increased incentives to compensate them for the additional hours in the classroom and the reduction in planning time.

4. Support decentralization at the commune and school levels to define flexible FDS models. The ability to adjust curriculum delivery schedules and weekly periods of instruction is an important and positive element observed at the commune levels. Weekly schedules and the deployment of boarding rooms for grades 4 and 5 were important local innovations facilitated by flexibility to make local decisions. Clear policies and guidelines on FDS will further support local implementation. District educators and school principals noted the need for clear guidance on the minimum conditions needed and/or required for FDS, along with anticipated training and support features they might be able to count upon as important elements of moving forward with FDS.

5. Support schools with substandard infrastructure. The school funding mechanisms that are based on formulas of the number of teachers and the number of pupils per school do not facilitate infrastructure support for low-grade school facilities. This problem is particularly observed at satellite schools. Mechanisms to get increased funding to schools with substandard facilities are important because the ability to bring schools up to standard is a key feature to providing an environment for successful FDS.

***Annex A. Field Survey Plan for October–
November 2008***

Draft

24 October 2008

Introduction

The Social Assessment for School Education Assurance Project (SEQAP) is an activity planned to support the overall design of SEQAP and its overarching goal to improve the quality of primary education in Vietnam.

The purpose of the social assessment is to obtain the views of education stakeholders in ethnic minority communities about recommendations for the Full-Day School (FDS) program. Various population groups will be contacted for their views and opinions in order to best plan strategies to improve primary education that meets community needs. The survey will gather input on experiences with FDS implementation where it has been applied, or opinions about moving toward FDS in new locations. Participants in the study will include local officials, parents and grandparents, students, teachers, and school officials involved as stakeholders in quality education in these communities.

Study Team

The social assessment activity is working in close coordination with the project preparatory teams from the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), and the World Bank in October–November 2008. Based on recommendations from the SEQAP preparatory teams, the field surveys will be undertaken in Kon Tum and Lao Cai provinces between October 28 and November 9.

The study team is composed of the following members, and divided into two groups to undertake the social assessment in the selected provinces:

- Mr. Myles Elledge (Study Team Leader) and Mr. Vuong Xuan Tinh will travel to Lao Cai Province beginning October 28, traveling by train to Lao Cai, and returning to Hanoi on November 4.
- Ms. Dao Van Vy and Ms. Nguyen Phuong Hong will travel by air to Playku, and onward by car to Kon Tum Province beginning November 2, and will return to Hanoi on November 9.

The key informant interviews within each province will focus on school quality issues to gain insights into the opportunities and constraints facing ethnic minority populations with regard to the implementation of full-day schooling. Conversation with key contacts will look into issues of school management, teaching and learning, and participation as part of the assessment. The field activities will be organized to facilitate contact with provincial and district officials, commune and village leadership, and school community stakeholders. Focus group discussions will be organized with teachers and parent groups. Information gained from the social assessment will be reported back to MOET, DFID, and the World Bank to support their efforts to design the SEQAP project. Parents will be a particular focus of the interviews to fill gaps in information not collected by the other SEQAP project design survey efforts.

The following table outlines a research hypothesis for ethnic minorities in education, and the issues surrounding improved quality and full-day schooling.

Vietnam SEQAP Social Assessment & Full-day Schooling

Constraint	Education
Physical, geographical, and demographic	Distance and geography matter for many areas Availability of school networks and boarding schools, while improving, remains an issue for many areas Density of minority population plays a role in access and quality
Economic	Education/transport requires out-of-pocket expenses Poverty correlates to low(er) participation rates FDS may constrain participation because of family work commitments or unavailable transportation Expense exemptions are given to ethnic minorities, although there are extra expenses to accessing supplies and instruction Out-of-pocket expenses are a constraint in access to teachers and instruction outside of school hours
Fiscal	Public resources are located in the towns and are more limited in most rural areas Targeted program resources may not reach all planned beneficiaries Salaries and subsidies are often late or unpaid
Legal and policy	Registration for migrants is a potential constraint Policies / eligibility for subsidies targeted to the poor
Lack of understanding and knowledge about the population to be served	School calendars don't reflect the local agricultural calendar or accommodate transportation constraints, nor does FDS schedule Minority practices not always well-understood Gender and minority student participation are linked in many communities
Competing knowledge systems, practices, and values	Material often foreign or not well-tailored to ethnic minority students Parental and community role models are few in minority areas Perceptions of the ROI in education complicated by FDS
Poor quality and relevance of services provided	Schools are not well-equipped and buildings are in a poor state; conditions may be a disincentive for attendance, exacerbated by the FDS schedule Real school hours or teaching hours limited Teachers are less qualified, more contract teachers Teachers' attendance in class and in training is lower in minority areas, linked to economic incentives/disincentives
Lack of attention to gender-specific considerations	Ethnic minority girls stay in school less than ethnic minority boys and majority girls. Minority ethnic groups are different and girls' participation varies across minority groups Boarding schools as an educational option are less appealing to girls and their parents
Language	Problem for primary school learning, and advancement to higher education Ethnic minority students fall behind, then often drop out

The draft social assessment survey instruments are attached in the appendix. The questionnaires will be executed in Lao Cai and Kon Tum provinces in a consistent manner. In each province, meetings will be held with at least two communes and two or more villages. The survey contacts will include meetings with

- Provincial Department of Education and Training
- District Bureau of Education and Training
- District People’s Committee Section on Education, and on Ethnic Minorities, and section on Education Statistics
- Commune and village leadership
- School visits in two or more villages, including meetings with school principals, teachers, and students
- Teacher and parent focus group discussions

District and commune selection will follow the lead of the province selection process. Field work will focus on areas that have a high density of ethnic minorities, have ethnic minority populations from some of the largest ethnic groups in the province, high poverty rates, and moderate enrollment rates.

Survey questions will develop a situation analysis of the school population, and gather basic information regarding school quality, attendance, and the views on full-day schooling.

A survey script to be reviewed with key stakeholders is also included in the appendix. In keeping with sound research ethics, this script provides a brief to participants on the purpose of the study, and gives assurance of the confidentiality of their participation and responses.

Appendix

1. Field survey instruments
2. Survey script

QUESTION	RESPONSE
STUDENT INTERVIEW	
SCHOOL NAME	
What is your teacher's name? Is your teacher male or female? What is your teacher's ethnic group?	
[Is the student male or female?]	
How old are you? [Confirm with school records if available]	
What language(s) do you speak most often at home?	
What grade are you in?	
What grade were you in last year?	
Did you have a meal this morning before coming to school?	
How long does it take you to go from your house to school? If it is raining, how long does it take? How do you travel to school?	
Did you miss any school days last week? [If yes,] How many days did you miss school?	
Do you like school? What is your favorite subject at school?	
In the last school week, did you ever study or review lessons outside of school? [If yes], for how much time? Roughly how many times, in number of days?	
In the last week of school, did you ever study or review lessons with classmates or friends outside of school? [If yes] About how often, in number of days?	
During the last school week, did your teacher help you personally with your school work? [If yes,] What did s/he help you with? Did your teacher help you outside of normal school time?	
Do you have cleaning or other manual chores to do at school? If so, think about the last week of school. On how many days last week did you do these manual chores?	
What are your hours at school? Do you study a full day or half day? Which one do you like better to help you learn?	
How do you feel about your hours at school? Do you wish for more hours? Is your school day too short or too long?	
[Review student handbook, ask to see textbooks]	
What type of work or help do you provide for your parents at home? Do you ever miss school to work with your family, or take care of your family?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
TEACHER INTERVIEW	
[District Name]	
SCHOOL NAME	
[Is the teacher male or female?]	
What is your first language? Ethnicity?	
What is your highest level of academic education?	
How do you describe your economic situation?	
Have you received professional pre-service training as a teacher? [If yes,] What was the length of the program, in total number of months?	
Have you received any formal in-service training as a teacher over the last 3 years? [If Yes,] About how many days total over that time? What was the content of this training?	
Have you been able to use the teacher training you received in your classroom? [If yes,] How often? Can you give us an example?	
What grade or grades do you teach in this classroom?	
How do you describe the condition of your school? (e.g., classrooms, supplies, bathrooms, electricity, cleanliness, nutrition, water, safety)	
Have you been teaching the same class since the beginning of the school year?	
In this classroom, how many boys usually attend? How many girls?	
Do you keep an attendance record of students? [If yes,] May I see it? [Check if current]	
In your classroom, how many boys are repeating the grade? How many girls are repeating?	
What is the ethnic composition of the students in your classroom?	
How many hours per day do you teach? How many hours per week do you teach?	
How many hours per day do you spend preparing for teaching? How many hours per week do you spend preparing to teach?	
Do you teach a full-day school schedule (FDS)? Do you teach a half-day schedule? If FDS, how do you find the quality of learning? Which schedule offers the best learning environment?	
What are the challenges of teaching a half day? What are the challenges of teaching a full-day schedule? Do you have adequate training and preparation to manage your school day?	
If policy was changed to a full-day schooling schedule, will your students and parents be supportive? Will attendance change?	
How do you assess life for ethnic minority students? (e.g., nutrition, preparation for school, uniforms, cleanliness, transportation, family support, homework preparation, ability to attend school)	
What difficulties do your students face? Are there differences among ethnic groups?	
Do you have textbooks? Do you use official textbooks for language arts, math, and science in your classroom lessons? (If yes,) How often, on average: Rarely, about half the time, or most of the time?	
[If teacher uses official textbooks]: How useful do you find them: Not very useful, Moderately useful, or Very useful?	
[If teacher does not use official textbooks]: Why don't you use the official textbooks in your class?	
When you have pedagogical difficulties and need support, from whom do you most often get assistance?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
(a) How often did school head convene a meeting with school staff in the last year? (b) When was the most recent meeting (date, approx OK)? (c) What was the principal topic of the most recent meeting?	
Over the last 5 full school days, was the School Head present during operating hours at the school? How often?	
So far this year, did the School Head or a senior teacher from your school ever sit and observe (your) classes when they were in session? If so, how often?	
Have you ever received pedagogical support from outside the school based on a problem you have reported? If yes, describe.	
How do you know whether your students are progressing?	
Do you think any of your students will not pass this year? [If yes,] about how many boys? How many girls?	
What helps your students the most to learn better?	
What is the biggest challenge that keeps your students from learning?	
Do you expect parents to review students' homework/exercise books?	
Do you talk with parents about school for their children, and their child's performance?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
PARENT INTERVIEW	
Community NAME & School Name	
How many children are in your household? How many children attend school on a regular basis?	
[Is the student male or female?] What is the age of the boy or girl child?	
What grade is your child attending in school? What grade did they complete last year?	
How long have you lived in this community?	
How do you describe your economic situation?	
What is your ethnicity? What language(s) do you speak most often at home?	
Did you attend school? What grade did you complete?	
How long does it take your children to go from your house to school? If it is raining, how long does it take? How do your children travel to school?	
Do your children eat meals before going to school?	
Do your children like to attend school?	
Did your children miss any school days last week? [If yes,] How many days did they miss school?	
Do you like your children's school? What level of education do you hope for your child to achieve? Are their different hopes and desires for your girl or your boy children?	
In the last school week, did you study or review lessons with your child? [If yes], for how much time? Did anyone else in your family provide support?	
During the last school week, did your child's teacher help your child with school work? [If yes,] What did s/he help your child with? Did the teacher help outside of normal school time?	
What are the normal hours at school? Does your child study a full day or half day? Which one do you like better to help him/her learn?	
How do you feel about your child's hours at school? Do you wish for more hours? Is his/her school day too short or too long?	
What are the challenges for you and your family if your child is asked to attend full-day school?	
In the last week, did you have contact with your child's teacher? Did you have contact with the school principal?	
What are your expenses for sending your child to school this year? Do you have the money to support them? Did you have to borrow money to cover costs?	
What type of work or help or work do your children provide for you at home? Do your children ever miss school to work with your family, or take care of your family	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
Local Government COMMUNE OR VILLAGE OFFICIAL INTERVIEW	
Community NAME	
Please describe the size and features of your community. What are the main economic activities in this community?	
What is the approximate categorization of households based on the Poverty Reduction Program categories?	
What is the ethnic composition of this community? What language(s) are most often used among community members?	
What level of support does the commune provide for the school each year? In 2007–08 and 2008–09?	
What do you see as important issues for education of children in your community? Are there big differences among participation or school achievement among families in the community?	
What is the role of children in providing labor and income generation for most families in this community?	
In your school, does the schedule follow a full-day school schedule?	
What do you personally see as the benefits and challenges of full-day schooling?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
Education sector public officials (Ministry, Province, District) EDUCATION OFFICERS INTERVIEW	
Location / Office	
What are the poverty alleviation policies and programs that impact ethnic minority education?	
Which policies have an impact on improving education for ethnic minorities? What are the positive effects? What are the negative drawbacks to these policies and programs?	
In order to improve teaching and learning in ethnic minority areas, what policies and programs are required?	
In [your location], how do you assess the quality of teacher and student learning? What is the quality of the schools and their management?	
What is your opinion about full-day schooling? Do you feel it is beneficial? What are the constraints to implementation? Are there alternative approaches that you recommend to improve quality?	
If full-day schooling is implemented, what supporting measures will be important to making it successful?	
What are the characteristics of the teachers in [your location]? How do you assess the quality of teachers? What are the main difficulties in teaching in your school/district?	
What are the main challenges in student learning and achievement?	
What are the achievement levels of ethnic minority students? What difficulties do they face?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
SCHOOL HEADMASTERS/PRINCIPALS INTERVIEW	
[District Name]	
SCHOOL NAME	
[Is the principal male or female?]	
What is your first language? Ethnicity?	
What is your highest level of academic education?	
How do you describe your economic situation?	
Have you received professional training as a teacher and/or school principal?	
[If yes,] What was the length of the program, in total number of months?	
What is the population, gender, and ethnicity of teachers in your school?	
What is the population, gender, and ethnicity of students in your school?	
What are the grades taught in this school? What is the language of instruction for each grade?	
In [your location], how do you assess the quality of teacher and student learning? What is the quality of the school building?	
Do you keep an attendance record of students? Are there patterns of attendance and absences among some families?	
How many boys are repeating the grade? How many girls are repeating?	
How many years have you been a principal? At this school?	
How many hours per day does the school operate? How many hours per week does the school operate? Are there differences of hours for different grades?	
How many hours per day do you spend preparing for teaching? How many hours per week do you spend preparing to teach?	
If FDS is implemented, what supporting measures will be important to making it successful? If FDS has been implemented, what measures have you found important to making it successful? Is your school equipped to manage FDS?	
Do you have an active parent association? What are its characteristics and membership, leadership? What are its important functions? How often does it meet? What topics does the association address?	
What are the main challenges in student learning and achievement?	
What are the achievement levels of ethnic minority students? What difficulties do they face?	
In 2008–09, what are the financial contributions/fees required from each student? From families?	
What are the characteristics of the teachers in [your location]? How do you assess the quality of teachers? What are the main difficulties in teaching in your school/district?	
What is the opinion of your teachers in implementing FDS?	
What is the opinion of your families/parents in implementing FDS?	
What is the opinion of your students in implementing FDS?	
Do you have textbooks? Do you have adequate supply of textbooks for each grade and student?	
Who provides students with paper, notebooks, and supplies?	
Does the school have electricity? How often?	
Does the school have good sanitation? Water supply?	
Does this school receive any funding or in-kind contributions from the local government? Other community sources? Parents? Donors?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
Teachers	
Focus Group Discussion	
How is the rate of participation and achievement of your students? What are your experiences with teaching in this community? Are there particular challenges faced by ethnic minority students?	
What are the factors contributing to lower achievement among ethnic minority students?	
If you are now participating in full-day schooling, what is your experience [for teachers, and for students]? What are the benefits? What are the difficulties?	
If your school were to move towards full-day schooling, what do you think about it? Do you support this direction? What do you see as difficulties?	
What type of support do you feel is important to implement full-day schooling?	
If you do not favor full-day schooling, what do you see as alternative approaches to achieving improved quality?	

QUESTION	RESPONSE
Parents	
Focus Group Discussion	
What are the main challenges for you and your children in attending school?	
Are you satisfied with the teaching and quality in your school? Are your children happy and making progress in school?	
If you are now participating in full-day schooling, what is your experience? What are the benefits? What are the difficulties?	
If your school were to move towards full-day schooling, what do you think about it? Do you support this direction? What do you see as difficulties?	

Survey Script

[In keeping with sound research ethics and practices, this overview of the study will be shared with social assessment participants.]

Dear Study Participant

This interview and discussion concerns your participation in the School Education Assurance Project (SEQAP) preparatory efforts which aim to improve the quality of primary education in Vietnam. This project preparation is the collaborative work of the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, British Department for International Development (DFID), and the World Bank.

It is important for us to make sure that you understand what the study is about and how you are being asked to be involved.

Below find some of the questions and answers that will hopefully clarify any issues about your participation in the study. This information leaflet is being read out and given to those participants as they join the interviews and discussions.

a. What is the purpose of this study?

The goal of the study in Vietnam is to obtain the views of education stakeholders in local communities about recommendations for Full-Day School program. Various population groups are being contacted for their views and opinions in order to best plan strategies for improving primary education that meets the needs of your community.

b. Why am I selected to participate in this discussion?

You are asked to participate in the study because you reside in a province area selected for this study.

c. Who else is participating in the study?

Participating in the study are local officials, parents and grandparents, teachers, and school officials involved as stakeholders in quality education in your community. This discussion and others will occur in the provinces of Kon Tum and Lao Cai.

d. What will we be asked to do?

You are asked to answer some basic questions about schools and teachers and your expectations regarding schooling, particularly on the issue of full-day schooling. This discussion will not take too much of your time.

An assistant may be used in this study in applying the questionnaire. The assistant has been trained in the necessary confidentiality procedures and has agreed not to reveal the identity of the people interviewed.

e. Are there any risks or discomforts connected with involvement in the study?

There should not be any risks connected with your involvement in the study. Your participation is voluntary, and your personal name or information will not be recorded and shared in anyway. Participants involved in answering questions may refuse to answer any question or take a break at any time during the process.

f. What are the benefits for my participation in the study?

Your participation in the study is considered to have benefits for thinking of ways to improve education in your community for you, your family, and for others in your community. No one receives any payment to participate in this study; it is voluntary.

g. How do you protect the confidentiality of the information gathered in this discussion?

Precautions have been taken to protect your information. Names of participants are not recorded. If the results of this study are presented at planning or scientific meetings or published in reports, no information will be included that could identify you or your family.

h. What are your rights concerning this study?

Your decision to take part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may refuse any part of the study and can stop participating at any time. Your participation in any future studies is also voluntary, and you may decide not to participate at any time.

i. Whom can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have any questions about the study contact Mr. Myles Elledge, Team Leader, SEQAP Social Assessment Team; or Mr. Vuong Xinh Tinh, Ms. Nguyen Phuong Hong, or Ms. Dao Van Vy, the study team members.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study participant, you may contact RTI's Office of Research Protection at: orpe@rti.org.