NIRAS

External Evaluation
of a multi-country
school infrastructure
program

Evaluation Report

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18 JUNE 2019

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

3Rs	Reading, Writing and Arithmetic
ALC	Adult Literacy Committee
ALP	Adult Learning Program
CBO	Community Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DEMO	District Education Manager Office
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GIR	Gross Intake Rate
GPI	Gross Parity Index
HQ	Headquarters
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OOSC	Out of School Children
PCR	Pupil Classroom Ratio
PLC	Project Leadership Committee
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
PTBR	Pupil Text Book Ratio
SMC	School Management Committee
TA	Traditional Authority
TOC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Dubai Cares, a UAE-based philanthropic organization, has entered into partnership with the international NGO buildOn, to address the related challenges of access to quality education and illiteracy, critical barriers for people living in rural communities. Within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG4) – 'Inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all' - Dubai Cares and buildOn share a vision of children's access to quality education as a tool to break the cycle of poverty.

Using the 'Adopt a School' model, Dubai Cares has raised funds from individual and corporate donors for the total value of USD 2,672,434 to construct 85 village primary schools in rural Nepal, Malawi and Senegal. With monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) at the centre of its global strategy, Dubai Cares commissioned NIRAS to conduct an independent evaluation of the buildOn approach, including field visits to projects implemented in Malawi and Nepal.

The **purpose** of the evaluation is two-fold, focusing on both major dimensions of evaluation - learning and accountability - to assess buildOn 'adopt-a-school' approach as a potential model for corporate social responsibility (CSR). The objectives of the evaluation are to learn from achievements and challenges in terms of school fnfrastructure, Adult Literacy Programs (ALP), and community engagement. The primary users of the evaluation findings are Dubai Cares staff, Dubai Cares donors who are interested in 'adopting' a school, and buildOn staff.

The Evaluation Team took a **utilization-focused approach**, integrating a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and Gender Equality (GE) into our methodology. We formulated the evaluation questions, provided in the Terms of Reference, as benchmarks for the standard OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. We elaborated detailed sub-questions under each benchmark (the Evaluation Design Matrix is found in Annex 4) which also functioned as a framework for our analysis and presentation of findings.

The evaluation adopted **mixed-methods**, combining in-depth desk studies of the projects in Malawi and Nepal; field level studies in 6 schools and 6 communities in Kasungu, Mwanza and Neno districts in Malawi and 6 schools and 6 communities in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts in Nepal; and two case-studies. Data collection instruments included a desk review; semi-structured observation schedules/checklists; in-depth key informant interviews (KII); semi-structured interviews (SSI); Focus group discussions (FGD), and an adaptation of the Most Significant Change technique.

Lessons learned are as follows.

1. In terms of *relevance*:

1.1. School construction was relevant to targeted communities, which were selected in line with buildOn site criteria; but collaboration with Local Government in site selection was somewhat limited and buildOn's overall methodology for targeting communities could be improved.

1.2. While the buildOn Covenant is a powerful vehicle for community engagement, target groups and Local Government partners are given little opportunity to negotiate the contributions which they commit to providing.

1.3. The rationale for the ALP is clear and community members appreciate the program; but participation in the design of the program is limited and deeper consultation and assessment of needs is required if the ALP is to serve as a platform for context-specific community development, as it is intended.

1.4. Community contributions in terms of local materials and labour constitute a fundamental contextual challenge; responses to challenges are piecemeal, pointing to a lack of any kind of risk analysis as well as the limited devolution of decision-making power in buildOn's organizational hierarchy.

1.6. The projects implemented by buildOn do not benefit from a 'culture' of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) and there is little evidence that monitoring findings are used to inform program management.

2. In terms of *efficiency*:

2.1. While the projects benefitted from the timely delivery of activities and targets, the structures and processes for participatory planning are few and far between, and this raises issues for not only for projects' efficiency but also for their effectiveness and sustainability.

2.3. The use of financial resources by buildOn Country Office teams is relatively efficient; however, country level staff experience several capacity gaps, particularly for M&E, and the limited investment in partnership with other NGOs, as an available resource and pool of expertise, seems a wasted opportunity.

3. In terms of *effectiveness*:

3.1. While school buildings meet national standards. there is little attention to quality SWASH and no provision made to sustain the school construction and infrastructure.

3.2. Although convincing anecdotal evidence exists for the positive impact of the ALP, the effectiveness of the program was undermined by its failure to reach male members in the community.

3.3. The original project design includes an intervention logic but buildOn's theory of change is incomplete and changes to programming were not generally documented and justified; as a result, the coherence of project implementation across outcomes and outputs could not be adequately assessed.

3.4. The lack of an M&E plan led to operational and overall programming constraints, not the least of which is the prioritization of reporting-for-accountability to donors, at the expense of the learning dimension of monitoring.

3.5. While accountability is an important feature of the global methodology, its focus is on one-way accountability of communities to buildOn, with only partial engagement of local government during the project cycle; similarly, centralized decision-making limits two-way accountability within buildOn's organizational hierarchy.

4. In terms of *sustainability*:

4.1. Strong school ownership by communities was created during the project; however, this did not extend to local government authorities and post-construction dialogue mechanisms to sustain the projects' outputs are missing.

4.2. In the absence of a clear exit strategy, buildOn's partner communities may struggle to continue building on project gains; nevertheless, the potential exists for stronger 'tripartite' partnerships between communities, local government and buildOn, as well as the integration of buildOn's intended outputs into decentralized plans.

4.3. Generally, there is a good 'fit' between buildOn's global methodology, as well as its future programming, and Dubai Cares' global strategy; future programming would benefit from steps in two related directions: a stronger, more supple, buildOn theory of change and greater focus for Dubai Cares through country-level strategies.

The following **recommendations** follow the flow of the four main phases of a conventional project cycle: *Initiation*; *Planning*; *Execution* (including monitoring and performance management); and *Closure*. Several of these recommendations may strengthen the positive directions already mapped out by buildOn in their development of strategies for 2019-2021.

1. Prepare the ground. We recommend that the overall project time-frame includes a designated inception period. Key activities during this pre-planning/planning phase: development of project-level operational plans; fine-tuning KPIs and process monitoring indicators to suite country contexts; ensuring the project's planned outputs align well with specific community needs as well as with local government priorities. A key activity should be a Country/region Situation Analysis, or Baseline Study, preparing Country Office Staff to respond to contextual challenges that inevitably arise during project implementation and guiding a project risk analysis. We also recommend that the current Community Profile template is revisited.

2. Complete and strengthen the Theory of Change. We recommend buildOn completes its intervention logic as a priority measure. The intervention logic may be strengthened by including intermediate outcomes/process outputs, which allow for decentralized planning, and a narrative description of the assumptions behind the intervention logic; The ToC should inform: the M&E plan; risk-mitigation strategies; change-management matrix for responsive planning, where progress against baseline targets for outcome and output-level indicators is reviewed and documented and the project/program is adjusted accordingly and changes to the program justified. We also recommend that buildOn ensure the three-year strategic intervention logic is not set in stone, but is iterative as any good ToC should be.

3. Move along a 'continuum of community engagement'. It is important that community engagement is undertaken as a progression from initial contact to continuous, two-way consultation and collaboration. As a *process*, the Covenant should be a reciprocal exchange of information, allowing community and local government partners to fine-tune the details of their commitments in line with specific contextual challenges uncovered by the Situation Analysis.

4. Invest in better planning. To strengthen current programming, we recommend that buildOn develop robust results-based planning and management instruments. A results framework at the global program level, should include a results matrix at the global program level, based on the completed ToC, accompanied by the M&E matrix, recommended below.(see Recommendation 5). Operational implementation plans at country level may include a change management matrix as a tool to identify indicator targets that are at risk, propose changes to bring the project/program back on track, and document justification for the changes made; operational plans would also benefit from a risk analysis and management plan.

5. Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. We strongly recommend that buildOn prioritizes finalization of its a global M&E framework before undertaking any monitoring activities. A 6-step process may be followed: (1) defining program results; (2) defining multi-level global/program and country-level/project indicators; (3) defining methods; (4) defining roles and responsibilities; (5) creating an M&E Matrix; and (b) collecting baseline data.

6. Set up a Mutual accountability mechanism. BuildOn should engage with the learning dimension of accountability by:

- Investing in community-based monitoring, using simple methods and tools (e.g. a Community Score Card);
- Making the project budget more transparent at the beginning (during participatory project design) and end of the project cycle;
- Institutionalizing quarterly or semi-annual meetings between the communities, buildOn and local government authorities;
- Further devolving decision-making power to the Country Offices, reflecting on which types of decisions are best taken on the ground; and what quality assurance/supervisory measures can be put in place, to ensure country-level decisions are appropriate and adequate.

7. Rethink the scope of ALP. We recommend the ALP builds on its gains in terms of basic literacy and household-level income-generation. A rapid appraisal of the adult learning environment in targeted communities, taken in line with the five dimensions of lifelong learning (SDG 4), would be a good place to start. This may be done as part of the Situation Analysis/Baseline Study, recommended above, and should accommodate

- A pre-/post participation literacy assessment test, in line with national assessment protocols and benchmarks (if these exist), launching simple process for continuous assessment of learning outcomes;
- A needs assessment for livelihood skills development/vocational training, taking account specific environmental factors; and
- An equitable focus on the needs and aspirations of men as well as women in the community.

8. Rethink community contributions. We strongly recommend also revisiting the notion of community contributions. In-kind contributions do indeed create ownership, but in some cases these are in fact in-cash contributions, which burdens households that are living in poverty. We advise three related measures:

- in the short term, continue allocating a buildOn contingencies budget for local material procurement, to be used *in extremis*, to avoid delays in school construction;
- in the medium term, enable communities to define and adjust their in-kind contributions, reflecting on their ability to procure local materials/labour, if these are not available;
- in the longer term, drop the provision of local materials as a Covenant commitment and instead ensure that buildOn school construction is included in decentralized education plans (see Recommendation 15), so that adequate resources may be allocated/disbursed by local government authorities, and/or costs are shared between local government and buildOn.

9. Make school construction more responsive to communities' needs. We recommend that the site selection process starts with a list of school building/classroom/latrine shortages provided by government, which is then measured against country-specific site selection criteria. Final decision-making on site selection should be the responsibilities of communities working with local government, with support from buildOn. We also strongly recommend that the buildOn enhances its 'state-of-the-art' construction reputation by introducing a degree of flexibility into the buildOn school infrastructure model; examples are provided in the main report.

10. Strengthen the effectiveness of ALP. We recommend that buildOn engages more with community members and adult learners to take into account context specific challenges and community-based adult learning needs. This may be done by including micro-planning activities – as part of ALP implementation –which are informed by the above adult learning rapid appraisal. If the ALP is expected to trigger wider community development, we also strongly advise increasing the budget for ALP. Alternatively, buildOn Country Office staff should focus on school construction and partner with other NGOs who are engaged in adult education and sustainable community development for the ALP component.

11. Improve reporting. We highly recommend a shift of focus from reporting-for-accountability to greater emphasis on the learning dimension of continuous monitoring and formative evaluation. The Draft of buildOn Global Outcome Indicators is a move in the right direction, but these outcome indicators require careful definition and significant resource investment will be required to measure them. It may be useful to improve existing reporting templates, providing (1) internal monitoring/progress report templates and (2) stakeholder/donor report templates. Additionally, the M&E plan should include strategies for timely, more systematic communication between buildOn and its development partners; and strategies for internal dissemination among the program team, as well as wider dissemination among stakeholders and donors.

12. Address capacity gaps. We recommend addressing a number of technical capacity gaps by conducting annual rapid needs assessments. There is a pressing and urgent need to recruit M&E officers at country-level. Examples of required professional development of staff are provided in the report. In addition, it may be a good idea to reassess the Country Office staff-salary structures, to ensure these comply with national standards. Where resources are not immediately available for mid-cycle training activities, partnerships with other local and international NGOs donors would leverage additional or complementary financial and human resources, filling short-/medium-term capacity gaps where these exist (see Recommendation 13). A resource-efficient way for institutional capacity support is the one-off investment of providing Country Offices with How-To Guides or a Tool-kit for planning and MEL; this may be utilized as an e-training package.

13. Mobilize partnerships at country level. Given that buildOn is a trusted organization, partnerships with communities could be deepened through alliances with other NGOs. We recommend conducting country-level stakeholder meetings for community representatives, local government partners, buildOn and other local and international NGOs at the close (and ideally also at the beginning) of a project cycle, in order to share good practice and link with those partners at country level who are working to address challenges in context specific areas (such as food security in Malawi and seasonal migration in Nepal).

14. Anticipate and initiate Phase 2 of the project cycle. We recommend building on existing target communities' increased demand for development beyond support from buildOn by engaging in post-project community mobilization. The 'Community mobilization Phase 2' could include the following measures:

- Post-construction guidance and support on how school communities can engage further with local government authorities to ensure action is taken to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the schools
- Capacity building for the SMC/PTA in (a) the function and responsibilities of local government authorities and the services they provide in relation to the communities; (b) school-based collaborative planning with local government authorities; (c) school maintenance and enhancement; and (c) community resource mobilization.
- Post-literacy needs assessments at community level, enabling ALP 'graduates' to move on to further literacy levels; and to other dimensions of 'lifelong learning'.

15. Introduce stronger exit strategy. We strongly recommend a carefully considered and constructed exit strategy; suggestions made by evaluation users in the field presented in the report.

1.1. BACKGROUND

Dubai Cares, a UAE-based philanthropic organization, has entered into partnership with the international NGO **buildOn**, to address the related challenges of access to quality education and illiteracy, critical barriers for people living in rural communities. Within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG4) – 'Inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all' - Dubai Cares and buildOn share a vision of children's access to quality education as a tool to break the cycle of poverty. The partners aim to improve educational infrastructure and secure equal access for boys and girls to safe learning environments with adequate facilities, learning materials, and academic support from gender-sensitized teachers and communities. Through an 'Adopt a School' model, Dubai Cares has raised funds from individual and corporate donors for the total value of USD 2,672,434 to construct 85 village primary schools in rural Nepal, Malawi and Senegal.

With monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) at the centre of its global strategy, Dubai Cares has commissioned NIRAS to conduct an independent evaluation of the buildOn approach, including field visits to projects implemented in **Malawi** and **Nepal**, with reference to the project implemented in **Senegal** (summaries of the country contexts are included in the Inception Report.) This Evaluation Report begins by outlining the evaluation purpose, users and scope, our overall approach and data collection methods, and the limitations of the exercise. In Section 2, we present our findings in the context of the buildOn projects in Nepal and Malawi. Finally, we elaborate our evaluative conclusions (Section 3) and lessons learned (Section 4) for projects in Nepal and Malawi; and present our recommendations, which are relevant to all buildOn projects in all three countries (Section 5).

The buildOn global program methodology is grounded in a belief that the sustainable development of villages, regions and countries is driven by communities who are empowered to build on their existing strengths, experience and wisdom. This belief challenges the 'North-South' divide of conventional development assistance, whereby the world's most economically poor receive handouts from the world's economically wealth. BuildOn programming rests on this premise: 'the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and low expectations can only be broken *because of* our communities, not *for* them' (buildOn, 2016). Community ownership of the development process and outputs is key.

To this end, 'rather than attempting to fill a void left by local government' (buildOn, 2016), an important feature of the buildOn approach is partnership with government. This is achieved through the collaborative selection of communities for school construction and infrastructure, as well as teaching-learning inputs provided by the national education ministries and, where required, government cooperation in introducing additional grade levels so children can complete a full primary-cycle.

The main components of the buildOn model, focusing on those highlighted by the evaluation ToR, are outlined below (further details of the global methodology are found in **Annex 2)**. It is important to note that a focus on gender empowerment cuts across of the buildOn programming components. This is evidenced by the mainstreaming of gender equity into the School Building Covenant, the Community Leadership Committees, the volunteer workforce, the ALP and the buildOn Team at HQ and country levels. Our evaluation will endeavor to highlight the ways in which women and men work together to achieve the buildOn model's planned results.

Component 1. School Construction.

The school building process begins with selection of the school site and community engagement through the buildOn Covenant, which constitutes a promise between buildOn and the target community, outlining their respective contributions and responsibilities. With some country-level variations, school construction comprises two-three classrooms and toilet blocks which are constructed in line with national guidelines and follow a schedule of approximately 90 days. School construction is done by community members, with technical support from buildOn, and international TREK volunteers working in solidarity with community volunteers. A Project Leadership Committee is drawn from within the community; its main role is to organize and lead the school building project, ensure adequate numbers of volunteer workers; provide local materials; monitor the worksite on a daily basis; and solve any issues to do with school building.

Importantly, the Committee is responsible for supporting the school after construction, ensuring it is equipped, that teachers are fulfilling their responsibilities and that parents are sending all their children to school. In some cases, the Committee's post-construction support role is transitioned to an existing School Management Committee (SMC).

In collaboration with buildOn staff, the Evaluation Team has compiled a comprehensive list of schools by name, year of ground-break, and location (district). This is provided in **Annex 3.**

Component 2. Adult Literacy Program (ALP)

The Adult Literacy Program (ALP) is designed to empower adult learners through the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, enabling them to appreciate the opportunity benefits of their children's schooling, as well as acting as advocates for the education of other children in the community. The buildOn ALP uses a 'curriculum of participatory, cooperative learning' (buildOn, 2016), which emphasizes real-world problems and solutions, drawing on the knowledge and experience of the participants, and includes thematic areas such as poverty reduction; health and sanitation (e.g. disease prevention, pre-natal care, and household hygiene); human and children's rights; and conflict resolution. In addition, participants in the ALP put their newly acquired literacy skills to the test, and address the opportunity-costs of primary schooling, through Village Initiatives, with seed money provided by buildOn. These community development initiatives generate incomes for families, enabling children who were forced to drop out of school for economic reasons to re-enter school, and helping children to remain in school. Examples of these income-generating activities: dry-season gardening, bee-keeping, animal husbandry, textile production, cloth-dying and other small business development; tree-planting; and school feeding.

Component 3. ENROLL

Enroll is designed to bring children to school who have never enrolled, or those who have dropped out, through community sensitization and capacity building activities. In addition, Accelerated Learning Programs are provided by local teachers for children who have never gone to school or over-age children who are unable to enroll in Grade 1. While Components 1 and 2 are supported by Dubai Cares, the buildOn Enroll program in Malawi, Nepal and Senegal is implemented with support from Educate a Child (EAC). Country Office staff endeavor to forge links between the three components through community engagement activities that cut across school construction processes, the ALP and Enroll.

The 'At-a-glance' **Table 1** below offers an overview of buildOn in completed and planned action in the target countries from 2013 to 2021 (compiled in collaboration with buildOn staff).

Table 1. At-a-glance: buildOn in action in Nepal, Malawi and Senegal

Program Detail	Nepal	Malawi	Senegal
Duration of partnership	**2013-2020**	**2015-2021**	**2015-2021**
School building	Construction of two/three-classroom schools fitted with furniture (seating for 150 pupils) and gender specific latrines, providing a safe and sanitary area for children to learn and for teachers to teach.		
Adult Literacy Program	Improved access to adult education and literacy skills by providing training to local facilitators to teach 60 illiterate men and women basic literacy over an 18-24 month period.		
Number of ALP groups	**44**	**12** (3 completed by March 2019, 7 to start in April 2019)	**15**
Number of learners	**45 planned** (not started)	**N/A**	**Approx. 458 (424 women)**
Community engagement	Improved community capacity, as the parents from each community volunteer their time to help build the school, monitor the project, and maintain the school once it is completed.		

1.2. EVALUATION PURPOSE, SCOPE AND USERS

The Terms of Reference (ToR) describes the **_purpose_** of the evaluation as being two-fold, focusing on both major dimensions of evaluation, _learning_ and _accountability_ (the ToR is found in **Annex 1**). Dubai Cares seeks to assess the approach used by its partner, buildOn, in order to learn more about the construction of low-cost school buildings, as well as the potential of the buildOn 'adopt-a-school' approach as a model for corporate social responsibility (CSR).

As such, the overarching objectives for the evaluation are as follows:

1. In terms of *School Infrastructure*, independently assess: progress towards/achievement of the country programs' planned results; compliance of school buildings to government standards; the utilization of gender-friendly school latrines; and alignment of the three programs to national education sector plans, as well as policy priorities for target groups.

2. In terms of *Adult Literacy Programs (ALP),* validate reported enrolment and attendance/retention rates, identifying the main enabling and disabling factors affecting access and participation in ALPs, particularly for women; evaluate the impact of the ALP on learners; and identify priority focus areas for future adult education programming in the target locations.

3. In terms of *Community Engagement,* identify and assess key internal and external factors that have contributed, affected, or impeded community engagement, and how the implementing partner has managed these factors; assess the methodology with regards to the selection of the targeted communities and locations; and local communities' perception of the volunteering component of the programs.

In line with the ToR, the four evaluation criteria used by the Evaluation Team are:

- ▪ *Relevance* of the program in terms of target groups' needs and reaching the most marginalized, education sector policy priorities and national development objectives;

- ▪ *Efficiency* of the interventions in terms of use of resources;

- ▪ *Effectiveness* of the program in terms of achieving planned results; and

- ▪ *Sustainability* in terms of continuation of the positive effects of the program, including its integration into the overall development and education reform context in each country, as well as its complementarity with initiatives undertaken by other development partners.

To optimize the *learning dimension* of the proposed evaluation, the Evaluation Team adopted a ***utilization-focused approach*** where the evaluation is done *with* and *for* specific intended primary users, for specific intended uses. A main premise of such an approach is that an evaluation should be judged by its utility and eventual use. At the same time, through an e*valuation for accountability* dimension, we sought to find out whether the implementing partner has performed as well as possible under the circumstances, and the extent to which the programs have achieved the results they were intended to achieve or could reasonably have been expected to achieve.

The Team integrated a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and Gender Equality (GE) into the evaluation. We probed the participatory and inclusive nature of the program, as well as the transparency of program processes and the mutual accountability mechanisms available for rights-holders, duty-bearers, and buildOn staff. We also assessed the direct gender outcomes/outputs defined by the program, as well as the indirect or secondary effects on women, and on interaction between the sexes. When soliciting the opinions, concerns and ideas of children for Community Case-Studies, the team ensured voluntary and safe participation, organized within a well-known and accessible venue.

In line with the ToR, the primary **users** of the evaluation findings are Dubai Cares staff, Dubai Cares donors who are interested in 'adopting' a school, and buildOn staff. However, Dubai Cares and buildOn may communicate evaluation findings to the following groups who will benefit from the evaluation's assessment: national/decentralized government education planners and managers; school-community leaders/managers; participants in ALP; teachers, parents and school children. Relevant evaluation results could be shared by buildOn during mass meetings in the target community, as such meetings are a well-established feature of the buildOn approach; at school-level, our findings could be shared with the Head Teacher who in turn discusses these with teachers and students.

1.3. APPROACH AND METHODS

At the core of the proposed approach is this question: *How do lessons learned from the buildOn model guide future programming supported by Dubai Cares?* A useful list of guiding questions corresponding to the evaluation criteria was included in the ToR, helping to outline the scope of the evaluation. After testing their evaluability through consultation with the buildOn team, the questions presented in the ToR were formulated as evaluation 'benchmarks', listed below.

1. RELEVANCE & PROJECT DESIGN

    1.1. Relevance of selected communities and school locations in the targeted regions; selection methodologies.

    1.2. Extent to which beneficiary communities were consulted with regard to project design (e.g. location, construction timing).

    1.3. Extent to which communities were consulted with regards to the ALP.

    1.4 Extent to which contextual changes, threats and opportunities that arose during implementation influenced and informed project implementation.

    1.5. Extent to which the changes proposed and/or implemented were appropriate in terms of overcoming the challenges faced during the project implementation.

    1.6. Ways in which the monitoring findings by the buildOn in-country teams were used to inform decision-making and improve project implementation.

2. EFFICIENCY

    2.1. Extent to which the program's processes and structures in place were capable of delivering program activities and targets on schedule.

    2.2. Extent to which buildings, ALP and community engagement activities were delivered in a timely manner.

    2.3. Extent to which program implementation made the best use of existing resources/capacity; e.g. the internal capacity and expertise of the implementing partners; and key limitations in resource utilization.

    2.4. Future programming directions exist to increasingly develop and invest in existing resources.

3. EFFECTIVENESS

    3.1. Extent to which school buildings and latrines meet national standards.

    3.2. Effectiveness and internal efficiency of ALP, with a focus on gender equity.

    3.3. Overall, extent to which the activities were carried out in line with the original project design; and extent to which the changes were, generally, adequately discussed, documented, and justified.

    3.4. Extent to which the monitoring and evaluation plan of the program is sufficient.

    3.5. Availability of a system and mechanisms to ensure accountability to the target groups; how well it worked.

4. SUSTAINABILITY

    4.1. Extent to which school buildings are owned and maintained by the communities.

    4.2. Extent to which the school construction programs are aligned with and integrated into local education plans, including financial resources allocated.

The Evaluation Team also elaborated detailed sub-questions under each benchmark, based on a preliminary desk review. The full list of questions, along with corresponding data collection methods and data source, is found in the *Evaluation Matrix* (**Annex 4**).

The evaluation benchmarks functioned as a framework for our analysis and presentation of findings for Malawi and Nepal, with slight amendments made to the sequencing. However, our preliminary desk review also enabled us to identify several evaluation hypotheses, as outlined below.

1. We note progress towards **planned targets** have been achieved in terms of *(1) school building; and/or (2) participation in adult literacy activities; and/or (3) community engagement in addressing barriers to enrolment and retention.*

2. In terms of **relevance**, the buildOn model for community-based development may benefit from greater conceptual coherence and more country-specific operational linkages between the model's components (i.e. school building, adult literacy and community engagement).

3. With increased investment in human resources within buildOn and by addressing technical capacity gaps at country and community levels, particularly for project monitoring, the *efficiency* of program implementation may be improved.

4. From the perspective of accountability (i.e. 'having clear lines of responsibility, knowing when those lines are broken, knowing what to do when something is going wrong, and taking action to right that wrong'), greater responsiveness to emergent challenges may enhance program *effectiveness* and improve progress towards planned results.

5. The model's *sustainability* could be strengthened by greater alignment with national education sector plans; and community ownership enhanced by embedding the model in local government / community development plans.

In addition to our evaluative conclusions, we draw on the evaluation findings to elaborate lessons learned, also relevant in the context of the buildOn Senegal project supported by Dubai Cares. Our recommendations are presented in terms of the 'flow' of a project cycle; while specific examples relate to the projects in Malawi and Nepal, we intend these recommendations to be relevant to programming overall.

Methods

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining in-depth desk studies of the projects in *Malawi* and *Nepal*; and field level studies. The field-studies focused on 6 schools and 6 communities in *Kasungu, Mwanza* and *Neno* districts in Malawi and 6 schools and 6 communities in *Kailali* and *Kanchanpur* districts district in Nepal. In addition, the field studies covered International Development Partners and the Ministry of Education in Nepal; and buildOn country staff and District Education Office staff in both countries.

Due to unavoidable constraints (such as the rainy season in Malawi, distance between sites, and limited time available for site visits), the schools/communities and districts were selected on the basis of their accessibility, in close consultation with Dubai Cares and buildOn staff. In order to draw general conclusions, the selection of schools was broadly representative of the buildOn program overall, taking into account, for example, the year of construction, a spread of both well-established and recently constructed schools; whether or not the school-community implements the ALP; and community engagement in planning, implementation and sustaining school-community activities.

In order to present a rich indicative picture of program achievements and challenges, we aimed at a 'deep-dive' assessment. All data collection instruments were administered by the Evaluation Team members.

- Task Team 1, comprising two Evaluation Team members, visited the following schools and communities in Malawi (*Kasungu, Mwanza and Neno districts)*: Mpeka – school and ALP; Chanthipwi – school; Chankhwali – school and ALP; Chipoza – school; Chimwembe – school; and Jimbe – school and ALP.

- Task Team 2, also comprising two Evaluation Team members, visited the following schools and communities in Nepal (*Kailali and Kanchanpur districts*): K Gaun – school and ALP; Balchaur – school and ALP; Loharpur – school and ALP; Solta – school and ALP; Sukumbasi Tole – school and ALP; and Fuleli – school and ALP.

Our data collection methods are outlined below; a full set of data collection instruments[1] were appended to the evaluation Inception Report.

(i) *A* **desk review** of relevant program documents for all three country programs (global program theory of change; project plans, annual progress reports and financial reports for all years of implementation; staffing plans; monitoring plans; baseline and reports, etc.) was a critically important starting point. We also reviewed available National EMIS data and secondary data generated by the program itself.

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[1] All quotations in this report are referenced as follows: key informant interviews with Dubai Cares/buildOn (KII:DC/bO); semi-structured interviews with Country Office Staff in Malawi (SSI-bOM) and in Nepal (SSI-boN); SSI with Local Government in Malawi (SSI-DEMO) and in Nepal (SSI-RM); FGD for school construction in Malawi (FGD-SCM) and in Nepal (FGD-SCN); and FGD for ALP in Malawi (FGD-ALPM) and in Nepal (FGD-ALPN).

The desk-study enabled the Evaluation Team to understand the expected results and country contexts, elaborate evaluation questions and triangulate field-study data. The review was initiated during the inception phase and continued throughout the assessment process, as additional documentation was accessed.

(ii) **Semi-structured checklist/observation schedules.** *Checklist 1 (School building) and Checklist 2 (Adult Literacy Program)* were administered in the targeted schools/communities in Malawi and Nepal, to collect basic information, fill data gaps uncovered by the evaluation desk-studies and verify existing data (e.g. school/community selection criteria, program KPIs, etc.).

(iii) **In-depth interviews.** As mentioned above, the team conducted *key informant interviews (KII)* with Dubai Cares staff in Dubai and buildOn Home Office staff. Team members also conducted *semi-structured interviews (SSI)* with buildOn Country Office staff, local government partners and NGO partners at country level. We used a generic guide and tailored it in line with specific areas of interest, issues of concern, and targeted respondents.

(iv) **Focus group discussions (FGD).** Team members facilitated community-based discussions using the *FGD guide 1 for school construction* and *FGD guide 2 for ALP*. Participants in FGD 1 included members of the Community Leadership Committee, School Management Committees (SMC)/PTA, teachers and community volunteers. Participants in FGD 2 included ALP facilitators/learners, and members of the Community Leadership Committee/SMC.

(v) **Community case studies** offered an opportunity for a 'zoom-in' analysis, drawing lessons for the buildOn model through Community Case Studies of the Nsalawatha community in Malawi, and the K Gaun community in Nepal. The focus of our analysis was *'community engagement'* - unpacking 'empowerment' - and the challenge of *sustainability*, with some exploration of the relation between school building, the ALP and community development initiatives.

In addition to using data collected using the checklists and FGD guides, we made use of our adaptation of the 'most significant change' (MSC) technique, a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation that focuses on learning (see **Box 1***)*, to collect data from Community leaders; ALP participants, teachers, parents and school children.

Box 1. The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique

The MSC technique is particularly suited to programs that: are focused on social change; are complex and produce diverse and emergent outcomes; have a numbers of organizational layers; are participatory in ethos; and are struggling with conventional monitoring systems. A wide range of organizations have found MSC monitoring useful for the following reasons:
- It is a participatory form of monitoring that requires no special professional skills. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures.
- It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organizational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number.
- It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate.

Source: Davies and Dart, 2005.

Limitations

Our access to program documentation, including comprehensive financial reports across the implementation period, was limited or offered too late in the evaluation process. The unavailability or late delivery of relevant documentation (including an M&E framework with clear indicators and baseline and reliable secondary statistical data) hindered our preliminary analysis of program performance and indeed our overall analysis.

We did not administer our data collection instruments in Senegal. This was because: in line with the ToR, field visits were conducted only two of the three countries where Dubai Cares partners with buildOn, and resources were not available to mobilize a local expert for Senegal for data collection.

The buildOn HQ staff provided written inputs on the 'Findings' section in the first draft of the report – which were incorporated into the final draft - followed by an e-discussion/learning event with the evaluation team, to address key concerns; but the buildOn team did not engage with the draft recommendations, which limited the utilization-focus of our learning-oriented evaluation approach.

However, the Evaluation Team were able access to relevant respondents in Malawi and Nepal, in order to assess whether the program activities were implemented as intended, and we benefitted from excellent in-country support provided by buildOn staff.

2.1. RELEVANCE

1.1. Relevance of selected communities and school locations and the selection methodologies used.

The selection of school locations in Nepal and Malawi was in line with buildOn's site selection criteria[2]. In the case of Malawi, of the six sampled schools, Chankwali, Chantipwi in Kasungu and Jimbe in Neno are in remote areas but difficult to access due to a poor road network; and Chimwembe in Mwanza and Mpeka in Kasungu are not far from the main road but in rural areas and operating mainly with temporary structures. Chipoza in Kasungu has a strong need for additional classrooms due to the high number of students. The evaluation findings from Nepal also confirm that buildOn's selection of school communities was grounded in expressed needs. In all the school communities we visited in Nepal, respondents said they had partnered with buildOn for at least two of the following reasons:

- The distance from children's homes to school: **"**before the bridge was completed last year, pupils had to cross the river to get to school"; "some children had to walk 6 or 7 kilometers every day"; "our pre-school aged children could not walk far" (FGDs-SCN).
- The poor condition of existing schools and/or the need for additional grades to complete the primary cycle: "the old school was not a permanent structure and was affected by floods"; "government-funded schools are of inferior quality, the sheet-iron roofs are dangerous during the windy season". (FGDs-SCN).
- The poverty-levels of community members: "We are a newly set up community of 562 families from the *Mukta Kamaiya* and *Badi* groups" (FGDs-SCN).

Broadly, the criteria used is adequate, as it targets populations in remote areas and those communities in need of schools. However, what is intended is, inevitably not what happens on the ground; our findings uncover several anomalies in buildOn's global methodology. These echo concerns of Dubai Cares Program Managers regarding the effectiveness of the selection approach: "Are they really selecting communities where their approach is most relevant?"(KII-DC).

First, the buildOn global methodology asserts that 'local governments are active partners in all projects and buildOn is not intending to fill a void left by the local government. Instead, buildOn works in partnership with the government to bring development through education' (buildOn, 2016, p.4). In theory, the selection process begins with local government partners providing a list for consideration by buildOn staff (buildOn, 2016, p.8). In practice, "sometimes the communities contact us directly and sometimes the government recommends a site" (KII-buildON); in both Malawi and Nepal, targeted communities had approached buildOn directly, requesting help in school construction because it was "impossible to receive support from government for building schools" (FGDs-SCN). Respondents in both countries argued for the greater engagement of local government in site selection and this was acknowledged by buildOn HQ staff.

A second concern is with regard to the final decision on a school-site. In Malawi, we found the community, guided by the local leader, takes the final decision on the school site. But in Nepal, final selection is made by buildOn staff on the basis of a Community Profile, as stipulated by the global methodology. In the absence of any detailed community-level situation analysis, the Profile document 'ensures the community meets buildOn's selection criteria' (buildOn, 2016). Yet the information provided by the Profile is limited. There is no description of the socio-political networks that link individuals, community organizations, and leaders or the underlying socio-economic barriers encountered by a specific community. Such contextual factor are critical for planning community engagement, identifying high-risk groups and behavior patterns and strengthening community networks (see Case Study, **Annex 6**).

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[2] The three site selection criteria are as follows: (1) 'Priority is given to rural/remote communities (schools which are far from main roads or difficult to access due to poor roads of challenging terrain) with preference to those which are suffering from extreme poverty; (2) No permanent school infrastructure exists in the community; a strong need for additional classrooms for an existing structure, approval from the Chief Program Officer is required; (3) Infrastructure contributions from local government and communities are made to ensure schools are supported and have teachers' (buildOn, 2016).

Moreover, it would seem that an additional selection criterion is that the target communities are located in areas that are safe and secure and can be reached by TREK volunteers on a one-week trip, ruling out communities in very remote areas, where the needs are arguably the greatest; "note that for the Dubai Cares Volunteer Globally groups, we must find a village that is driving distance for a hotel each day" (KII-buildOn). The value-added dimension of buildOn's volunteer program (TREK) is undeniable (see **Box 2**). But almost half of the questions in the Community Profile template are designed to assess the community's suitability to host Trek volunteers and securing donor funds. Indeed, the Community Profile template requests a quote from a community member about the school project. 'You may have to ask a few people until you get something that sounds good! These are important! This is how we help the people sponsoring the school get to know the community, even if they won't be going on a Trek' (buildOn Community Profile).

Box 2. Volunteerism is inspirational

The global methodology insists that buildOn Trek is not a vacation, a poverty tour, or 'voluntourism'. "We make sure TREK volunteers know what they're getting into and that it's a human person-to-person engagement. buildOn does a good job in this". As the TREK manager in Nepal puts it, "TREK is a bridge, establishing a human connection. I think that TREK shows the communities there's an external factor, people who care, who are invested in their future. It's very beautiful when you go beyond a signature on a cheque and the community actually share time with an outsider" (SSI: bON). This view is echoed by target groups in the communities in Nepal: "when our people see that rich and educated people are coming to work with them, they are inspired" (SSI-RM; FGD-SCN).

'All citizens from the buildOn movement experience the methodology and outcomes first-hand' (buildOn, 2016); TREK is an "immersive experience" for volunteers (SSI-bON). But it is a short immersive experience (1 week) and in the case of Dubai Cares Global TREK, "now we don't do TREK in Nepal because it is too far away" (KII-DC). Moreover, volunteers' skills are not matched to needs in the community (as in the case of VSO International), "because buildOn focuses on construction (KII-DC).

This said, evidence of the "great value of volunteerism" is mostly anecdotal. While Dubai Cares uses a simple satisfaction survey tool, it is very limited in scope; we were not able to access the closed Sales Force platform used by US TREK volunteers to upload their experiences. There is no analysis of the interaction between TREK volunteers and the communities. The 'Adopt a School' documentation, calling for donor engagement offers no learning from previous experience; and the version used for Dubai Cares donors in the UAE has not been adapted from the US version. Rather, there seems to be an assumption, shared by buildOn, Dubai Cares, and the communities themselves that the TREK volunteer model is a good one because it attracts funds.

The global methodology allows for the construction of an additional school on a previously selected site, providing second/third site selection criteria, including: 'the overall enrollment is stable or has grown since the first school construction' (buildOn, 2016). This criteria makes sense from the perspective of building in communities where households value schooling and are committed to keeping their children in school; "with limited resources, it does not make sense to build additional classrooms in an extremely poor community that has decreased enrollment" (KII-buildOn). But if enrolment is unstable because of seasonal household migration triggered by poverty as is the case in Nepal, for example, then the selection criteria arguably reinforce inequities within a community, favoring those communities which are not, as the buildOn methodology puts it, "suffering from extreme poverty".

A consensus among buildOn country staff and target groups in both Malawi and Nepal is that the methodology is "not flexible enough to meet communities' needs"; for example, "some communities are very keen to partner with us to build high schools but because of our criteria we can't work with them" (SSI-bON). Indeed, in Malawi buildOn is no longer constructing schools, but builds classrooms in existing schools and is focusing on Kasungu only (SSI-bOM).

There are exceptions to the rule of the buildOn approach. In the case of the Solta school-community in Nepal, a former secondary school building served several villages in the catchment area and children were forced to travel considerable distances to attend school. In this case buildOn agreed to convert the existing building into a girls' hostel while the new school would be used for classes. In Malawi, buildOn is considering the construction of secondary schools. Overall, however, country staff argue that "We are only investing in building – the 'hardware' - and ignoring the other factors. We need to work on the 'software' too, meaning the factors that keep kids in school and help them to learn better in school" (SSI-bON). This said, buildOn global strategies suggest that future programming will address such issues related to 'software', through the Enroll component of the buildOn approach (KII-buildOn).

2.1.2. Extent to which target communities were consulted with regard to project design.

The main vehicle for community engagement by buildOn is the Covenant, which constitutes a promise between buildOn and the village community, outlining their respective contributions and responsibilities (see **Table 2**). In line with buildOn's approach, buildOn staff in both Malawi and Nepal used illustrated placards during a series of mass meetings to explain the partners' respective contributions. Following an initial site visit, community members themselves (both women and men) used the visual aids in a second meeting to present key points of the methodology and community contributions. Before signing, buildOn staff read the Covenant (translated into local languages) in its entirety, allowing time for community members to ask questions or voice concerns. Lastly, the Covenant was presented by the community in the first week of construction.

Table 2. Contributions of partners according to the Covenant

Community Contribution	buildOn Contribution	Local Government Contribution
1. Commitment to educating boys and girls equally; 2. Unskilled labour for the construction provided equally between men and women with the willingness for the worksite contribution of women to break traditional gender roles; 3. The land on which the school will be built; 4. High quality local materials; 5. Project management through a Leadership Committee; 6. Lodging for buildOn team: Field Coordinator, skilled laborers, and visiting Trek Teams; 7. Safe storage of the materials while on site; 8. Commitment to enrolling all children of school age; and 9. Commitment to maintain the school after the project is completed.	1. Non-local construction materials; 2. Transport of non-local materials from vendor to site; 3. Skilled labor needed to build the school; 4. Project management (Field Coordinators and Construction Managers); 5. Construction plans (Architectural plans which are approved by the local government, are designed to withstand natural disasters; and 6. Leadership training for the Project Leadership Committee.	1. Provide the teachers, curriculum, learning materials and the management of the school in partnership with the community; 2. In some buildOn countries, local government will pledge to provide some local materials, provide teachers, curricula, learning materials and monitoring of the school; and 3. During the Leadership Meetings, buildOn staff train the community leaders on holding the government officials accountable; in cases where community leaders are unsuccessful in securing the resources promised in the Covenant, buildOn staff intervene by leveraging future school construction projects.

Source: buildOn 2016

In line with the global methodology, again, after signing the covenant a Project Leadership Committee (PLC), with some roles on the committee held by women, was set up in all targeted communities, selected by local leaders in Malawi and elected by the community in Nepal. We found that in both countries, communities felt the PLCs functioned well. Working in collaboration with the School Management Committee (SMC) and local leaders, the PLCs in all communities organized and led the school building project, working together to ensure adequate numbers of community volunteer laborers and availability of local materials and, as we will see in Section 2.1.4 below, dealing with challenges that arose during construction. In Malawi, the communities used a block-based approach where the villages were divided into blocks and each block was assigned one to two days per week to participate as volunteers. However, in Chipoza, where most community members were too busy with their businesses, a group of 20 people (12 male and 8 female) were assigned to work every day on behalf of the blocks and given incentives by each block.

On the one hand, the Covenant-focused process of community engagement was well received by buildOn's partner communities and respondents in local government. As the former Nepal Country Director put it: "I have been working with communities for a long time, but the buildOn's community mobilization is uniquely successful. They take time, through multiple meetings, to create a sense of self-help; it is a really effective method of mobilizing community resources" (SSI-bON). In Malawi, too, community engagement, triggered by the Covenant, is perceived by community members as taking part of the development process; not only contributing with local materials but also contributing towards accountability, ownership, and knowledge for sustainability. For buildOn staff in Malawi, "it's where we start brainstorming with the community about the services and their role in the project" (SSI-bOM).

On the other hand, buildOn's community engagement is challenging in terms of voluntary labour and the contribution of local materials. The Covenant-centric approach is problematic for two reasons.

- First, the buildOn approach to community engagement has a strong *information focus*: we make sure people know 'This is what you get'"; "we say 'to get that you need to put in this': this is what the buildOn model is" (SSI-bON). As a result, *rather than being a two-way consultation and negotiation of about can be achieved*, the process of engagement is more about the clarity of a target community's understanding of their responsibilities under this particular mode of partnership.
- Second, it is a relatively fixed model; the approach is "pretty much set in stone" (SSI-bON). Under the terms of the partnership, target communities are not able to adapt or expand a buildOn school structure. "the buildOn model is a brand and the Home Office says, 'this is what makes us unique'" (SSI-bON).

Importantly, we found in Nepal that local government priorities are not necessarily taken into account; "Some communities have basic schools and want to build upwards, adding multi-storey classrooms; others need post-basic grades 6-8 or secondary schools; some schools are needed where there is no road access at all" (SSI-RM); it seems buildOn is considering future expansion into secondary school construction (KII-buildOn). Generally, however, respondents in local government suggested: "It would be good if buildOn could respond to specific needs within a community, not only within the region or district, rather than offer a fixed model" (SSI-RM).

2.1.3. Extent to which communities were consulted with regards to the ALP.

According to the buildOn global methodology, 'buildOn staff work with community leaders and local government partners to identify community ALP-sites, prioritizing communities with low adult literacy levels' (buildOn 2016). Specific selection criteria for the ALP are that communities are required to: express an interest in a continued partnership beyond the school construction program; have a commitment from the community leaders to support an ALP in the community; have the will to transform themselves economically, socially, mentally and voluntarily work together to meet the needs of the community (buildOn 2016).

In both Malawi and Nepal, we found that the buildOn approach for establishing an ALP is broadly adhered to. The selection of ALP sites and participants was integral to the process of establishing the partnerships for school construction. During the signing of the Covenant, community members who are illiterate signed with a thumb print and these individuals were invited to self-select as participants in an ALP. Facilitators applied for the position and were interviewed by buildOn staff. Selection criteria include a secondary school leaving certificate; good knowledge and understanding of the relevant culture and norms within the community. In addition, it was essential that the facilitator was accepted and endorsed by the entire community and leadership. Once recruited, facilitators receive training in how to use the curriculum/facilitator's guide. ALP activities were conducted in the school or in a participant's home.

A further selection criteria for the ALP is that the community has 'participated in a buildOn School construction project and demonstrated a strong community presence and commitment to partner with buildOn' (buildOn 2016). With regard to this, during in-depth interviews, Dubai Cares' Program Managers for buildOn projects in Nepal, Malawi and Senegal expressed a shared concern: "Why, even where members in one village say they want an ALP as part of their buildOn project, is the ALP held in another village where there is no school building component?" (KII-DC). An answer may be found in the caveat offered by the global methodology: 'While a donor may provide funding for both, the ALP may not necessarily be implemented in the same community as school construction, where the selection criteria [listed above] are not met. In these cases, another community is selected' (buildOn 2016).

While the curriculum aligns with the national curricula in both countries (see **Box 3**), in the case of Nepal we found little evidence that the curriculum had been tailored to communities' socio-cultural and economic contexts. The buildOn ALP uses a 'curriculum of participatory, cooperative learning' (buildOn, 2016) intended to empower to use newly literacy skills to improve their lives, their children's lives and help to develop their communities. Common thematic areas for the buildOn curriculum, including poverty reduction; health and sanitation (e.g. disease prevention, pre-natal care, and household hygiene); human and children's rights; and conflict resolution. the curriculum is in fact a facilitators guide. Similarly, the curriculum for ALP in Malawi was not designed in a participatory manner nor was the schedule discussed with the participants, though participants could choose which day to be off in the week.

> **Box 3. The National Adult Literacy Program in Malawi**
>
> *The National Adult Literacy Program* (NALP) has been operating without a policy specific to the education sub-sector since it was launched in the country in the 1980s. However, the National Education Policy (NEP 2016) stipulates a 10-month learning cycle for adult literacy programs aiming to be delivered to all communities and equip adults with specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes and techniques to independently engage in listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy, technical and critical thinking in order to contribute to the national development process. Guiding tools for the running of adult literacy programs have included National Development Goals, Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, Poverty Reduction Strategy and Millennium Development Goals. A National Adult Literacy and Lifelong learning Policy is under development and planned to be ready 2019. The adult literacy rate is defined as the proportion of the population aged 15 years old and above who can both read and write and can understand a short simple statement on a day to day basis. According to the Integrated Household Survey (HIS 2010-2013), the literacy rate in Malawi grew by 6 percent to 71 percent in 2013, from 65 percent in 2010. In rural areas there has been a significant increase to 67.6 in 2013 from 59.6 in 2010 (GoM. The 2014/15 Education sector performance report).

Nevertheless, key questions were also raised by Dubai Cares' Program Managers: "Is there really a clear rationale for the ALP?"; "Where's the link between the two project components, what's the logic?" (KII-DC). This is perhaps answered by two key assumptions that underpin buildOn's ALP: the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills is integral to the process of empowering adult learners, enabling them to 'recognize knowledge that exists in the community and work together to effect community change' (buildOn, 2016); and newly literate parents are more likely to appreciate the opportunity benefits of their children's schooling, as well as acting as advocates for the education of other children in the community.

We found evidence that both these assumptions were shared by target communities in Nepal and Malawi. In Nepal's target communities, participants expressed a high level of interest in the ALP and are keen to continue their learning: "When I was a child I wanted to study but my parents had migrated to Kolkata and we were eight in the family with only my father earning. So, I left school. But if there was a chance to finish Grade 8 I would" (FGD-ALPN).

Yet in our discussions with ALP participants we also found that the main objective of ALP is often perceived as being able to sign one's name. "I didn't join because I can already sign" (FGD-APLN). Such a limited understanding of the scope and relevance of ALP undermines the possibility that the ALP can function as "a platform for community-based development" (buildOn, 2016). Overall, the link between adult literacy and 'community development' is relatively weak and efforts to put literacy skills into practice appear to have been frustrated:

- "We tried to start a monthly savings and credit group as part of our Mothers' Group but it is difficult to get people to unite"; "we want to use the accounting applications on our mobile phones but we can't";
- "It would be good to receive social security payments from the government but how?";
- While some community members received training in cultivating mushrooms, "we don't a have dark room for mushroom cultivation and so we constructed a thatched hut but it's not effective and production is not good production".

Indeed, the ALP appears to be of little interest to men in the communities in both Malawi and Nepal. During our FGD in K Gaun village, all of the men left the discussion; it seems that for buildOn project participants, though women participate in school construction and hold positions in the PLCs, the participation of men in ALP is limited. We discuss the issue of gender equity in the ALP further in Section 2.3.2.

Generally, participants in group discussions in both countries were satisfied with the program and topics. However, our assessment is that providing an advanced course would require greater consultation and involvement of the communities in the curriculum design and schedule. This would ensure the program meets the needs of the communities, as well as securing and ownership of the ALP and consequently stronger commitment. Our FGD group participants in Nepal identified the following as income-generation and livelihood skills training activities that would be particularly relevant to their community development contexts: safe seasonal labour migration practices; animal husbandry; livestock fodder cultivation; vegetable farming; agricultural extension on cash-cropping, particularly sugarcane cultivation and harvesting; tailoring; and wildlife-friendly cultivation methods (e.g. in areas where elephants destroy crops). There are undoubtedly a wide range of other context-specific skills need for development activities. For Malawi, with regard to the choice of income generating activities, it is important to assess what the community can actually do within its geographical location and context, taking into account issues like distance to market, arable land, environment/climatic conditions. We discuss the relevance and effectiveness of buildOn's ALP in Malawi further in Section 2.3.2.

Revised 2.1.4/5 Extent to which contextual challenges that arose during implementation were responded to, influencing and informing project implementation.

Before discussing this benchmark, the Evaluation Team would like to highlight two points. First, the extent to which the changes effected during project implementation guided the overall programming is very much determined by the 'legacy' of buildOn. In the case of the buildOn Country office team, "We're very much working within the founder's vision. It's a simple one: we build and handover to the government. It's a recipe that hasn't changed much over time" (SSI-bON). As the TREK Manager, a former Peace Corps worker in Nepal, put it: "In Nepal, so much has changed but the formulae hasn't changed" (SSI-bON). Secondly, and related to the above, we found no effort had been made during the project design phase in either Malawi or Nepal to identify risks and mitigation measures "it is difficult for buildOn to identify the challenges and mitigate the risks against the consequences" (SSI-bOM). In the absence of any existing project risk analysis, our assessment is based on our interviews and discussion; however, we present a retrospective risk management framework for school construction under 'Lessons Learned'.

In the context of the implementation of school construction projects in Nepal, some specific challenges faced by school-communities are listed below.

- Community in-kind contributions are necessary to create ownership, but, a critically important finding from Nepal is that "local materials are not always cost-free, so community members need to purchase them, and this puts a burden on households that are living in poverty" (SSI-bON). Similarly, all the communities we visited in Malawi asked buildOn to remove quarry stones/concrete aggregate from the list of materials to be provided as a community contribution because of the burden of having to raise funds to purchase and transport these materials. Indeed, the Social Welfare Committee, Kailali District has questioned the buildOn methodology "because the community contribution is so high" (SSI-bON). In some communities, construction was halted because local materials could not be bought by the PLC and they were not able to quickly raise funds.
- Mobilizing communities to contribute in terms of local labour is difficult where low-income households have competing priorities such as seeking wage-labour opportunities through seasonal migration; "many of the men from our poorest families leave to work on construction sites in India and our women also work as daily agricultural labourers" (FGD-SCN).
- In one community, a dispute arose because the school site was 500 meters from the Border Post and the Indian Border Police claimed the land was Indian territory; the dispute was eventually resolved by the Senior District Administrative Officer, but construction was delayed by several weeks;
- In another community, the site selection was made without consideration of a water supply, and this was not reflected in the budget. "We had no *hand-pump, so w*e carried water from the river by hand for curing the roof and Trek volunteers did what we did" (FGD-SCN); the cost of a handpump is approximately USD 200. In the case of Malawi, communities are encouraged to source support from other development partners for water points and were able to drill boreholes drilled near the sites.

A common response to these challenges was to approach local government for funds for local materials. In one school-community the rural municipality stepped into to contribute a total of Rs 15,00,000 (USD 13,636). In another, the municipality provided Rs 500,000 (USD 4,545) for each buildOn school. In another case, the PLC raised a of loan Rs 40,000 (USD 363) from the existing Mother's Group Savings and Credit Committee; 50% of this loan is outstanding. To make up local labour shortfalls, the Nepal Police force provided 20 men who worked for a few days.

A persistent and fundamental problem in the context of Nepal is the quality of education, specifically the shortage of qualified teachers and resources for contract teachers. Again, this challenge is met through a combination of local government support and resources mobilized by the communities themselves. "We have many temporary/contract teachers in our community-schools because there not enough funds to pay salaries for permanent teachers" (SSI-RM). In one community, the municipality deployed a teacher, but he hasn't turned up. We go to the mayor in person to follow up, but he still hasn't turned up and it's been a year since we first requested help" (FGD-bON). At the same time, "those families who have funds to contribute raise the quality of teaching by hiring qualified teachers prefer to send their children to private English medium schools" (FGD-bON). In another community "we owe a contract teacher over 100,000 (USD 1,000), which the municipality has promised to pay but it is not yet received". Yet another school has a long-standing debt of Rs 6,00,000 (USD 5,455) for teachers' salaries.

Thus, an unplanned result in the Nepal context is perhaps the strengthened partnership between local government and the school communities. "Previously the people believed it was government's job to provide school buildings, but then buildOn changed this through by introducing self-help and the communities were inspired by outsiders to help themselves. At the end of the day, the communities come back to the municipality for help." (SSI-RM).

In the case of Malawi, local government does not support communities with local materials but technical guidance and provision of qualified teachers. Our findings from group discussions and interviews with the Country Office team include the following challenges faced by target communities:

- "There is a high demand for ALP and Enroll but buildOn doesn't have the financial resources so there are not enough centres, a lack of qualified facilitators and a lot of participants are left out in the communities" (SSI-bOM).

- While ALP participants are able to prepare a village 'map' of income-generation opportunities, the start-up funds provided by buildOn are limited (see 2.3.2); this is "intentional", to encourage community mobilization (KII-buildOn) but is a major constraint for communities living in poverty. Similarly, bursaries and scholarships for learners who are doing well and want to progress to the secondary level are not available.

- While community engagement is essential for the project to succeed, the level of participation in the south is lower compared to Kasungu. This is primarily due to food-insecurity because the land available for cultivation is limited. This was the case in Jimbe and Chimwembe, for example, where "because of hunger, community members needed to find means of getting food" (FGD-SCM). A related problem is the demand for allowances by partners and chiefs (other organizations provide for allowances but not buildOn). The provision of labour by the community was organized in different ways. In Mpeka, Chanthipwi, Chankhwali, Chimwembe and Jimbe, the community divided themselves into groups, taking turns to participate once a week, Monday to Saturday. In Chipoza, the community leadership appointed volunteers (8 men + 12 women) to work on their behalf every day.

- Target communities contributed local construction materials, including sand, bricks and quarry stones, as well as unskilled labour; on average each community contributed 45-tons of sand, 75,000 – 80 000 bricks and 40 tons quarry stones. But some communities faced difficulties in mobilizing funds for quarry stones, which caused delays in construction. This challenge was resolved by the community raising the funds themselves; for example, Mpeka contributed MWK12,000 (equivalent $22) to buy and transport the quarry stones. In some communities the materials are insufficient because "the distribution of materials is the same for all schools and does not take into account the actual demands of the site" (SSI-bOM). A lack of transport for the materials is a related challenge; in Chanthipwi and Chankhwali community members carried the materials themselves over two-three kilometers.

- Unavailability of water/borehole for construction and drinking; for example, in Chankhwali, water was transported manually from a nearby stream; in Mpeka, the community were provided a borehole by another NGO, Concern Universal.

- "Low quality construction materials, poor workmanship due to lack of skilled artisans, corruption and weak monitoring by buildOn" (SSI-bOM).

The Malawi team reported that the following measures were taken to address these challenges: "procurement of materials is extended to the city suppliers; to improve workmanship, artisans are trained by buildOn team, retained and used in various project sites; procurement/sourcing quotation of materials involves a group of staff in the procurement committee to avoid possibility of collusion; and buildOn is in the process of recruiting a team of three Engineers as monitoring and evaluation staff to address the issue of weak monitoring" (SSI-bOM).

We noted few operational changes made during implementation of buildOn projects in Malawi, with the exception of the following: where there was a high demand for classrooms, additional classroom blocks were built (Chipoza); the cultivation of soya beans was terminated in Mpeka, as community members were making losses; more attention was given to on-site safety, such as providing steps when the school is located on different ground levels; and some efforts were made to fighting corruption by clearly identifying specifications for the materials. As we will discuss later on in this report (Section 2.3.5), responsive programming and management is undermined by a feature of the buildOn approach, which was itself identified as a challenge: the very limited devolution of decision-making powers from buildOn USA to its Country Office (SSI-bON and SSI-bOM).

2.1.6. Ways in which the monitoring findings by the buildOn in-country teams were used to inform decision-making and improve project implementation.

In general, as Country Office staff pointed out, buildOn projects in Nepal do not benefit from a 'culture' of monitoring and reporting of monitoring results: "We don't do much monitoring because we are busy implementing (SSI-bON)"; reports rely heavily on photographic evidence of community engagement and school building. As **Table 3** shows, reported data are limited to four key performance indicators (KPIs). In both Malawi and Nepal, the logical framework indicators are not measured. There is a paucity of available baseline data, which is largely limited to numbers of enrolled children, participants, teachers and facilitators.

Table 3. Snapshot of KPI monitoring results for 2016-2018

Community	KPI: Volunteer Work Days	KPI: Total Enrollment	KPI: Enrolment % girls	KPI: School Quality (# of teachers)
NEPAL				
Hatkholi	1523	320	54.3	14
Dhakka	1221	389	59.6	10
Solta	1502	668	49.1	20
Pillariphata	833	147	67.3	5
Pariphata	1129	291	53.9	12
Balchaur	2293	170	58.8	5
Phuleli	1173	102	60.7	7
Bawanpur	N/A	152	55.2%	5
Jagatpur	N/A	119	56.3%	6
Bargadhi	N/A	156	54.5%	7
Amarpur	N/A	678	59.3%	19
Perahni	N/A	149	56.4%	8
Dudhiya	N/A	78	55.1%	6
Loharpur	N/A	114	60.5%	3
Jonapur	N/A	79	60.8%	7
TOTAL	**9674 (partial total)**	**3612**		**143**
MALAWI (2017 only)				
Chikoko	4415	812	50.2%	6
Sathamapira	2614	160	50.6%	4
Chimwembe	2115	234	41.9%	8
TOTAL	**9144**	**1206**		**18**
SENEGAL				
Kaffrine 2 Sud	910	257	54.5%	6
Kapaye Keur Ndiaga	1159	60	65%	1
Beureup Sow	986	37	54%	1
Keur Alioune Diop	1033	66	40.9%	1
Gapp	1066	107	56%	4
Ndiarogne Serere	984	97	52.6%	2
Keur Macoumba Kebe	619	112	61.6%	3
Ndouffouck	832	377	54.3%	7
Diamaguene	928	56	28.6%	1
Ndiandiaye	1,087	98	54%	2
Keur Moussa Hann	903	44	43.2%	1
TOTAL	**10507**	**1311**		**29**

Source: buildOn Annual Country Reports 2016-2018

In our preliminary analysis of buildOn reports, we found that data are missing/inconsistent at school level; just one example is Jimbe school in Neno district, Malawi, which was constructed in 2015, but is reported in 2017 as a newly created school and for which there is no available data on school enrolment /teachers/grades.

We also found discrepancies between monitoring results and annual reports; for example, the 'baseline' documents identifies 1447 enrolled pupils and 19 teachers for Chikoko, Chimwembe and Sathampira schools in Malawi, but on the ground these figures are reported as 1,206 enrolled pupils and 16/18 teachers. Similarly, for the ALP we found discrepancies between the information provided by ALP facilitators and the ones provided by buildOn staff; an explanation for this is that "the initial data was collected in first quarter soon classes resumed and the one with dropouts was taken in 2018 last quarter" and enrolment data is inconsistent because "participants join the programme at any point they wish" (SSI-BoM).

As no targets have been set for the KPIs, it is not possible to track progress over time. Moreover, the selection and design of KPIs is inflexible. For example, the indicator for 'Number of Volunteer Work Days' includes a fixed compulsory target for volunteer attendance and does not take into account the fact that "on some days you need a lot of people on the construction site, like during ground-break and laying the foundation, and sometimes you need only a few" (SSI-bON).

The KPIs for the ALP are particularly problematic in both Malawi and Nepal. There are significant data gaps in terms of enrolment and attendance and two of the three indicators are difficult to measure: Assessment of participants' learning outcomes; and changes made to the community measured by outputs (e.g. trees planted, latrines dug, micro-finances loans, amount of income generated). In Malawi "the target number of ALP learners per group has been reduced from 60 to 40, due to financial constraints and the need to reduce the facilitator/learner ratio" (SSI-bOM). The frequency of monitoring visits to Mwanza has also been reduced, as the country program in Malawi has been scaled back and activities in Mwanza phased out; in Mwanza there were cases where ALP was being run in parallel with government-provided literacy classes (SSI-bOM).

In the case of Nepal, the education sector has established a robust and highly decentralized Integrated Education Management System (I-EMIS) and school-level data are available for a comprehensive set of indicators, used to track progress against national sector performance indicators (see **Box 4**). However, routine administrative data are not used by project staff. This is because "EMIS data are updated annually, but we need to track changes in enrolment every three months" (SSI-bON). But it may also be because Country Office staff – like many local government officers – simply lack the technical capacity for data analysis and use. Similarly, in Malawi, buildOn schools participate in the annual school census, but EMIS data are not used.

> **Box 4. Types of school-level data generated by Nepal's I-EMIS**
> Previous address; Current address; GPS location; School Name, Type (Basic/Secondary), IEMIS Code, School bank A/C
> Total enrolment ECD, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3;
> Enrolment by sex, grade, ethnic group ((Janajati, Dalit, Muslim) and total;
> Learning achievement by grade, subject (Nepali, English, Math, Social Studies, Science) and grade average score
> Head teachers by sex and total; SMC members by sex and total; Teachers/Teachers trained by name, sex and total
> Local government support by grade; Mentoring (number of School Visits; data related to School management);
> School-level activities (participants by sex in meetings with VEC/WEC, PTA meetings)
> *Source:* Datasheet extracted from I-EMIS, Nepal

Indeed, the use of monitoring data to guide decision-making and improve programming, overall, is limited. This said, the Country Director of buildOn-Nepal has taken the initiative to collect data on out of school children. These data triggered the use of Educate a Child (EAC) funds for multi-age/multi-grade teaching to address the needs of at-risk children. Nevertheless, a critically important finding is that we found little evidence of analysis and coherent use of monitoring results for adaptive buildOn programming. At the country level, once a school has been constructed, there is limited attention to data collection and/or the use of monitoring results to stabilize the community-based projects.

The lack of a strong monitoring 'culture' is arguably a reflection of the centralized nature of decision making in buildOn's organizational structure, as we have suggested above and discuss further under 2.3.5; that is, the focus is on reporting for accountability – and fund mobilization – rather than on the learning dimension of continuous monitoring and formative evaluation. This may be because "some donors don't demand detailed monitoring data and just want photos" (KII-DC). Indeed, it is true of Dubai Cares' demands as donors; while Dubai Program Managers would like to see the results of rigorous monitoring and more comprehensive reporting, the Communication Department, Fundraising Department and Community Engagement Department (responsible for TREK for UAE citizens) requested "more human interest stories and more photos" (KII-DC).

2.2.1. Extent to which the program's processes and structures in place were capable of delivering program activities and targets on schedule.

According to the 'Adopt a School' calls for donor support, individuals and organizations are invited to 'adopt a program' in Nepal, Malawi or Senegal with the following two main 'hardware' and 'software' components (Dubai Cares, Adopt a School, 2019). The Evaluation Team found no rationale for the differences in target numbers.

Hardware	Software
Construction of 1 three-classroom (2-classroom in Malawi and Senegal) primary school with furniture to accommodate up to 90 (100 in Malawi and 60 in Senegal) students each and gender specific latrines.	Capacity building and training for adult education facilitators, literacy training for 50 (60 in Malawi and Senegal) men and women, and community based development.

In the case of Malawi, project implementation was generally on time, with the exception of delays in the construction of two schools, namely Chimwembe and Sathamapira; this delay was due to scarcity of cement which raised the price by 15 percent. Some of the enabling factors affecting the good results are listed below:

- Good relationship with the community and training provided by buildOn;
- Community involvement and willingness;
- The community-oriented approach which means that buildOn doesn't work in isolation but with relevant stakeholders; "by sharing the challenges, ways to overcome the barriers are brought up together" (SSI-LGM);
- Total commitment by buildOn so there is no break in the construction process: provision of materials in time and at once (because the procurement of the construction materials is done in advance); frequent supervision of buildOn staff on the site: "availability of monitoring by buildOn and district education officers promote effective implementation of the project" (SSI_LGM);
- Identified and trained pool of artisans who are engaged in various projects;
- ALP participants identified from the signing of attendance list for the whole community.

Factors impacting negatively on the timely implementation of activities in Malawi include, "time-consuming procurement procedures" (SSI-BoM); poor quality assurance of the mix of materials by both buildOn and the local government, which led to some cracks appearing in the building soon after construction; difficulties in finding qualified facilitators for ALP in certain communities; and delays in communities providing local materials (quarry stones).

Country Office staff in Nepal identified a key enabling factor for the timely construction of schools: the strict schedule and timeline (90-106 days) (see **Annex 7**). "The timeline is very tight, but we *must* stick to it and we have to report to HQ on progress every month" (SSI-bON). Under the leadership of the Senior Engineer, the Country Office ensures that the foundation is laid only once the community has fulfilled its commitment and 60-80% of local materials have been deposited at the location. Construction is monitored by the engineer, using construction schedule. As schools in Nepal open in May, the school construction must be completed by mid-April.

Conversely, it is this very rigidity that has resulted in delays in program delivery. The buildOn methodology for partnership insists on community contributions in terms of volunteer labour and local materials; but, as we have seen in the previous section, school-communities are often unable to collect local materials and/or raise funds to buy them. "This is main reason for delays in construction, but community contribution is a strict rule for our model" (SSI-bON).

In recent years, the Nepal Country team had "big challenges to complete school-building on time" in five school communities (Katase, Bojarila, Ghaidhara, Nimaboji & Thengarpur) it has taken almost a year to complete because local materials were not collected by the communities; in one of the communities activities ceased and the partnership was "terminated due to poor performance" (SSI-bON). In Katase, where the problem was the mobilization of local labour, the project began in 2017 but was just completed, in 2019, only because buildOn hired the services of a local labour-contractor. It should be noted that all five communities were unable to access support from local government.

From the buildOn programming perspective, projects generally have a three-year life-cycle, during which all program components are implemented. Yet, in the case of Nepal, we found that target communities had only a hazy notion of the buildOn project, beyond the school building component, and its time-frame. The Covenant refers the 'life of the project' but does not clarify the duration of partnership between buildOn and the community beyond the time-frame for construction. Indeed, buildOn Country Office staff use standard planning instruments to track implementation and deliver outputs against target deadlines; these include a GANTT Chart and project budget, using templates provided by the Home Office. But the only planning tool that engages the target communities is the Covenant. We further discuss the issues related to participatory planning under Section 2.4 'Sustainability'.

2.2.2. Extent to which buildings, ALP and community engagement activities were delivered in a timely manner.

In the case of Malawi, the construction schedule was set at 12 weeks but in some communities, construction was completed in less time (8 weeks), while in others it took over 15 weeks to finish. While the schedules and plans for construction were not made available to the Evaluation Team, and therefore could not be verified, we found that the established 12-week schedule was not suitable for all sites because the conditions are different. Sometimes completion deadlines were not met because "there are times the work is not perfect we need to go back and fix" (FDG-SCM). In the case of the ALP, the Country Team staff state that adult learning classes have not started as planned in some communities "due to delays in the disbursement of funds by Dubai Cares" (SSI-bOM).

In Nepal, with the exception of the five school-communities mentioned above, the construction of buildOn schools was completed in a timely manner. In all the school-communities visited by the Evaluation Team, a school was constructed by buildOn on sites where operational schools previously existed (see **Box 5**); as a result, the newly constructed school was up and running immediately after completion of construction (albeit with teacher shortages, as discussed above.)

Box 5. buildOn schools visited in Nepal
Shree Garima Primary School, K Gaun, Kailali: Addition to existing government school; first site selection.
Shree Rastriya Secondary School, Solta, Kailali: Addition to existing government school; first, second and third site selection.
Jivan Deep Primary School, Balchaur, Kailali: Completely; first and second site selection.
Shree Janahit Bal Primary School, Loharpur, Kailali: Addition to existing government school; first site selection.
 Shree Mangal Basic (Primary) School, Phuleli, Kanchanpur: Addition to existing government school; first site selection.
Bal Jagriti Primary School, Sukumbasi Tole, Kanchanpur: Completely new location; later, the government supported construction of an ECD building; first site selection.

The ALP duration is two calendar years across all countries, but with differences in construction time and implementation period, to allow for seasonal harvesting (as buildOn works primarily with farming communities) and monsoon periods. In Malawi, Session 1 runs from April to December, then a break between December and March. Session 2 takes place in April-December with a break between December to March and final examinations in March-April. Classes run five days a week from 2 to 4 pm.

In Nepal, the program runs from September of Year 1 to May of Year 3, including a break during the monsoon season; Year 2 starting in May and running through August. Classes are run six days a week for two hours a day. During the months of October and November when rice is harvested, many communities hold their classes at night time or even early in the morning. With reference to buildOn Nepal's GANTT chart, the Evaluation Team can confirm that (ongoing) adult literacy activities and related income-generation activities took place in line with the planned time-line. However, the need to run concurrent adult learning activities for multiple cohorts of adult learners in different target communities causes "a lot of confusion" for the Nepal Country Office staff responsible for the ALP.

2.2.3. Extent to which program implementation made the best use of existing resources/capacity; e.g. the internal capacity and expertise of the implementing partners; and key limitations in resource utilization.

Funds for the buildOn programs in Nepal, Malawi and Senegal are raised through an annual 'Adopt a School' call for expressions of interest by donors in the UAE: 'Dubai Cares is offering its donors an opportunity to adopt a specific program designed to help children to go to school in one or more of Dubai Cares' selected developing countries … By supporting a Dubai Cares program, you are investing in real change in the life of a child and his/her community' ('Adopt a School' Call, 2019). Dubai Cares functions as a channel for these funds as the national regulatory framework in the UAE does not permit the direct financing of buildOn programs. The approximate cost of a buildOn program (including 'hardware' and 'software') in 2019 is between AED 132-000/USD 36,000 (Malawi) and 152,500/USD 41,500 (Nepal).

The Evaluation Team had limited access to financial reports and our request to buildOn for a consolidated financial report, across all years of support from Dubai Cares, was not met in a timely manner. Based on two financial reports covering 9 schools[3] in Malawi, the assessment by the Evaluation Team is that budget-wise the buildOn did not overspend. With a budget of USD 32,621 per school the average expenditure per school is USD 25,883 or 79 percent of the total budget (financial report 6 schools) and USD 24,946 or 76 percent of the budget (financial report 3 schools). The main reason is the low or non-expenditure for community education program and related in-country salaries. The community education programs were planned to start in April 2019 with the exception of two schools in Mwanza (Chimwembe and Sathamapira) due to buildOn phasing out.

Our analysis of four financial reports for Nepal, covering 21 of the 50 schools supported by Dubai Cares, shows the following:

- For the reporting period 1-2-2015/ 2-15-2018 and six schools, there is an overspend of 116 percent.
- For the reporting period 1-1-2016/ 9-15-2016 and eight schools, there is an overspend of 115 percent.
- In the report dated 31 Aug 2018, covering six schools expenditures show that only 84 percent has been spent; the construction component shows also an expenditure of only 93, 44 percent.
- In the report dated 18 Aug 2018 covering one school (Phuleli), expenditure was 81 percent of the budget due to non-expenditure for component 2.

This fragmented picture is further complicated by the inability of Country Office staff to explain the reasons for over- and underspending. During the field visit, we were told this is because the total budget received by the Country Office does not match the total reported project costs, as presented in the four reports mentioned above, but the precise time-frame for the occurrence of this discrepancy was not clear.

In relation to existing resource capacity, the Country Director was of the opinion that buildOn Malawi has good staff with good qualifications: "BuildOn has actual capacity to build more – up to 80 schools blocks per year – but they are not doing it due to lack of funds" (SSI-bOM). However, from the discussions with the staff, the assessment is that there is a gap in relation to the construction team since the only engineer is the country director and a M&E team that is lacking. BuildOn Malawi plans to have a quality assurance team of three people (engineers). In Mwanza the team lacks a finance person. As for the education program, the difficulties faced are the high staff turnover and "in finding qualified people to stay for a longer period" (SSI-bOM).BuildOn Malawi has also faced limitation in the use of resources. They were not able to use the opportunity available to buy in back materials at a reduced price because the financial arrangement does not allow for that.

In Nepal, from the human resources perspective, the Evaluation Team identified capacity gaps in programming at two levels. At the buildOn Country level, the Nepal Office is adequately staffed in terms of numbers. However, discussions with Country Office staff uncovered significant capacity gaps in these areas: program/project monitoring, particularly assessing the impact of so-called community development activities; planning and managing the ALP and community-based income-generation; responsive management of school-building activities "we run into many challenges from the community which staff can't deal with; this puts a big pressure on field coordinators" (SSI-bON).

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[3] These are schools built 2017-2019. Financial report 6 schools: Chanthipwi, Chaziza, Kapanje, Chipoza, Chipoza II, Kalanga; Financial report 3 schools: Chikoko, Chimwembe, Sathamapira; Financial report for Mpeka, Jimbe and Chankhwali schools (built 2015-2016) was not provided to the Evaluation Team

We found the buildOn Nepal Country Office staff to be a closely-knit team of highly motivated and committed young people. On the one hand, efficient program delivery relies heavily on the diversity of staff profiles: "a Tharu community is a world away from a mountain community, but we can manage this because our staff are from diverse communities and can draw on a wide-range of their own personal experiences" (SSI-bON). On the other hand, "We have really a *lot* of responsibilities", yet this is not reflected in the rates of remuneration, or in the annual rate of increase of staff salaries (SSI-bON). While this is apparently being addressed by the Home Office, low remuneration has resulted in the past in a high staff turnover. Repeated requests for staff capacity building, in line with job descriptions and specific responsibilities have not yet been responded to by the Home Office.

At the level of Dubai Cares program management, the Evaluation Team found that five Program Managers handle large portfolios of multiple programs in several countries at the same time; "We're a small team overseeing a huge number of grants in many countries, and we do everything from A to Z, planning, administration, reporting performance monitoring plan, *everything*" (KII-DC). Dubai Cares' senior management recognize and are responding to organization's human resource constraints. Nevertheless, the Program Managers for Nepal, Malawi and Senegal assert that: "the buildOn model is a straightforward model and shouldn't take up so much of our time, but it does! I need the buildOn program to demand less of from me as program managers" (KII-DC). Inevitably, effective program implementation – including timely reporting – impacts on effective overall resource management, and *vice versa*.

2.2.4. Future programming directions exist to increasingly develop and invest in existing resources.

The buildOn team has identified the following four program outcomes:

- *Civic Engagement/Community engagement*: A sense of social responsibility; willingness and commitment to acting to address needs of one's community;
- *Academic Engagement*: Increased school enrolment for children and adults, increased promotion rates, increased completion rates from primary school, and increased parental involvement children's education;
- *Empowerment*: Ability for all people regardless of gender or ethnic group to fully participate in personal and community development. Expanded sense of possibility. Sense of control over destiny;
- *Poverty Reduction*: Increased earnings and improved economic self-sufficiency for community members regardless of gender or ethnic group (buildOn, 2016).

However, as buildOn Home Office staff pointed out, the program's 'theory of change' is a work in progress, currently lacking results at the intermediate outcome/output levels and any discussion of the assumptions behind progress from one level to the next. In its present form, the ToC broadly aligns with the intended outcomes of the US-based Afterschool Youth Program, presented in an impact evaluation framework designed by a team from the Heller School, Brandeis University (buildOn, 2010).

The buildOn three-year 'Strategic Plan' identifies as its overarching goal: to 'break the cycle of poverty, illiteracy and low expectations through service and education'. Its strategic vision is: 'Over the next three years, buildOn will focus on achieving the first benchmark of our 25 Year Vision. We will continue to deliver best-in-class service learning programs in under-served urban neighborhoods in America, while *mobilizing communities from the economically poorest countries to build best-in-class schools.* We will invest and grow more deeply in the cities *and regions where we work to create systemic change*' (buildOn Strategic Plan, 2019, italics added). *buildOn Global's* specific objective is to 'expand reach, increase the depth, and multiply the impact of programs … while growing programs by 55% (Strategic Plan, 2019). The *buildOn Global* strategic growth targets for 2019 - 2021 are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Strategic growth targets for 2019 – 2021 set by buildOn

Target Area	2019	2020	2021
Number of schools built per year	215	350	368
Total number of schools built	1,777	2,127	2,495
# of people participating per year	229,750	282,250	337,450
Total Staff	260	312	328
Total budget (buildOn US and Global)	$20,926,000	$25,190,000	$26,239,000

Source: buildOn Strategic Plan, 2019.

We note with interest that the value-added dimension of integrated programming is a key feature of the buildOn Global objective, which highlights the importance of '*leveraging synergies*' between the Global program's Adult Literacy, Enroll, School Construction, and Trek components (buildOn Strategic Plan, 2019).

Indeed, the Evaluation Team found that there is a good 'fit' between buildOn's future programming in the three project countries and Dubai Cares global strategy, particularly its outcome related to 'Access to Education' – "Both buildOn and Dubai Cares stress the value of a bottom-up approach". This said, we could not assess the extent to which buildOn programming aligns with Dubai Cares country strategies, as these do not yet exist. (We discuss the potential for Dubai Cares' programmatic focus and country-level coherence in strategic planning under 'Lessons Learned".) On the hand, the question: 'should Dubai Cares continue its partnership with buildOn?' was met with mixed responses among XX:

> *"Yes, we think there is a lot of good stuff there we should continue as long as the adopt a school model can raise funds";*
> *No, we should divert funds to a more sustainable model, which we can track and measure";*
> *"I do see the value of building a school but I'm not sure about the ALP";*
> *"I am frustrated with buildOn. And buildOn is frustrated with us asking too many questions"*
> *(KII-DC).*

On the other hand, we note the encouraging directions of buildOn Global's future strategies for school construction, Enroll and ALP. Some promising examples are extracted below from the buildOn Strategic Plan. (We discuss these further in relation to our 'Recommendations' in section XX.)

- Ensure that communities are tracked to continue building schools without buildOn.
- Completely overhaul adult literacy program reporting to include KPIs and assessments on literacy gains, community empowerment, gender equity, poverty reduction, and academic engagement.
- Prepare to scale up summer Treks by creating a volunteer internship for qualified college students to support Community Teams.
- Establish real-time digital portals that provide access to impact reports and community impact stories, photos and photo/videos and are accessible to all stakeholders and staff.
- Create the role of Impact Officer in each country to ensure both quality and timely collection of impact stories, photos, and metrics (buildOn Strategic Plan 2019-2021).

A major finding with regard to investment in existing resources is the lack of collaboration with other civil society organizations (CSOs). The approach to partnership between buildOn and the target communities in both Nepal and Malawi – such a key feature of the global methodology – did not extend to local community-based organizations (CBOs), or national and international NGOs, and development agencies.

In the case of Malawi, it is interesting to note that the target communities "prefer to work with buildOn because the construction is faster and better and other donors take time in their decisions" (FGD-SCM). Nevertheless, partnering with other donors and NGOs is viewed as an opportunity "bring more development to the community, based on buildOn experience"(SSI-bOM). For example, the school in Chanthipwi could be upgraded to include Grade 8 and function as a full primary-cycle school; in Jimbe, "there are still children walking 17 km one-way to attend school, so we need to build another school"; and for communities in Mwanza District, reaching out to other development partners will be necessary as buildOn is phasing out its participation this Southern part of Malawi including Mwanza District (FGDs-SCM).

In Nepal, the Country Office staff report, on the one hand, that they requested permission to establish partnerships – beyond partnering with a local NGO, BASE at inception of the office - but were told that alliances with INGOs and development partners are best handled at the level of the Home Office. On the other hand, it seems that partnership building at country level is encouraged by the Home Office (KII-buildOn). Whatever the case, we found little evidence of partnership with international and local development partners in the education sector, including: the ADB, Australia, DFID, EU, Finland, JICA, Norway, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, WFP, and the World Bank and NGOs working in the Far Western Region, in related development domains, such as USAID/KISAN, CIMMIT, HELVETAS and PACT (working in Livelihood skills development/income-generation), Plan International and the Social Empowerment Building Accessibility Centre- SEBAC (working in SWASH and behavior change), and ActionAid-Nepal (working in the adult learning domain) (Gon/MoE, 2016).

From Dubai Cares' point of view, the poor quality of buildOn's reports has constrained efforts to forge further international partnerships between buildOn and Dubai Cares' other partners; "We would like to share with other international development partners, and we want this project to move from the charitable level to development level, but it's not yet been possible." (KII-DC).

2.3. EFFECTIVENESS

2.3.1. Extent to which school buildings and latrines meet national standards.

In both Malawi and Nepal, school construction took place through the following steps: consultations with local government on the design standards and specifications; community engagement for participation in school construction; and local materials were collected and/or procured, along with services of individual contractors (foreman, bricklayer, carpenter; painter, sign writer). Finally, the ground-breaking ceremony was conducted in each target community to mark the commencement of school construction. Frequent monitoring and supervision was undertaken by field coordinators.

In the case of Malawi, the overall quality of construction materials, furniture, works (structure, finishing, fencing, visibility; hazard issue if any etc.) was found to be satisfactory and we confirm that buildOn followed the national construction processes and procedures. We noted that the foundation design and actual construction was adequate. Though we could not confirm the depth of the foundations, respective communities shared the details of types of materials used to construct the foundation, which included concrete footing with mix design ratio of 1:3:6, sub-structure wall of burnt bricks on mortar ratio of 1:4/1:5 and brick-force while the floor slab was constructed from reinforced concrete of 1:2:4 mix and A98 wire-mesh laid on compacted selected soil materials covered with damp proof membrane (dpm). The evaluators, however noted the following:

- The batching for mixing mortar and concrete did not use gauge boxes but wheelbarrows (one bag of cement was equated to one wheelbarrow), indicating that the mix ratio for mortars and concrete were relatively weaker than what is specified in the design. Surprisingly, this was checked and accepted by buildOn Field Coordinators who were responsible for monitoring and supervision.

- The mixing of concrete was done manually by communities who are not well trained in mortar/concrete mixing. This is a quality control challenge that may need to be improved by buildOn. At Mpeka School (where a new block is being constructed by buildOn but not financed by Dubai Cares), the evaluators noted that some of the materials delivered were not of the specified quality as per list of the materials. In the case of corrugated iron sheets, the width did meet the required 28 gauge width.

- The quality of doors for the classrooms and lockable shelves in all schools is of low quality and durability. The classroom furniture (desks) provided is in general of good quality and child user-friendly. But pin boards were not provided despite its provision in the designs; and the classroom furniture is insufficient for classroom blocks built in 2018. The evaluators also noted that the number of classroom furniture provided per block has been reduced from 50 to 40 per school block due to budget constraints, i.e. 20 desks per classroom instead of 25.

- The change from use of breeze blocks to welded steel rings/frames has greatly improved provision of light in the classrooms. Initiatives were taken in Mpeka, Chankhwali and Jimbe schools to beautify the school grounds by planting more trees in the surrounding areas.

We found no evidence of government approval on the plans and no certification of the school buildings by the government. There is currently no requirement and procedure for such certification of public buildings at local government level.

In the case of Nepal, on-site observation showed that for all schools visited by the Evaluation Team:

- Complete architectural drawings are available, these are compliant with government standards, and the lay-out was done correctly, as per the design. The selected site is stable, with no risk of flooding, or water logging and the overall quality of construction materials used was satisfactory, meeting established standards.

- BuildOn has an engineer for overall monitoring and field coordinator with junior engineering background who closely supervised the school construction to maintain standard workmanship as well as assuring the quality of local materials. Non-local materials were supplied by buildOn, with no participation from the community/PLC in decision-making; however, the materials used were satisfactory.

- The school buildings were all structurally stable (structural integrity; walls, columns, beams and to withstand natural disasters/earthquake etc.); however, there are minor cracks in the walls, particularly at plinth level, which need to be repaired. All classrooms were well ventilated and with sufficient light.

- Overall quality of the construction is satisfactory (structure, finishing, fencing, visibility; hazard issue if any etc.). However, the quality of painting workmanship is poor in the interior. This needs to be improved for future school construction.

- The chalk board has been constructed by cement sand plastering on the wall; however, furniture was not supplied in 3 schools (Shree Garima Primary School, Shree Janahit Bal Primary School, Bal Jagriti Primary School) and there is no disabled-friendly ramp constructed in these schools.

- There is a hand pump for drinking water, but this is in poor condition and the two-cubical toilets are in poor condition; both water and toilets were not part of buildOn project support. The toilet block is not disabled-friendly and menstruation hygiene-friendly and lack good ventilation and lighting.

2.3.2. Effectiveness and internal efficiency of ALP, with a focus on gender equity.

Under Component 2 of the buildOn program, 44 adult literacy groups were set up in Nepal (2013-2020); 12 groups in Malawi (2015-2021); and 15 groups in Senegal (2015-2021).

In **Nepal**, as **Table 5** shows, the total current enrolment of adult learners in the target communities visited during this evaluation was 223. In the last reporting period, a total of five participants dropped out of the ALP (three due to distance to learning centre and two migrated to India). Due to incomplete data we were unable to compute retention and completion rates.

Table 5. ALP program Facilitators and Participants (Nepal)

S.N.	Community Name	Facilitators Name	Facilitators Qualification	Participant Enrollment		
				M	F	Total
1	K Gaun	Sunita Chaudhary	B.Ed. 3rd year	-	34	34
	K Gaun	Bhim Bdr.Tiruwa	ICom pass (Inter level)	-	33	33
2	Balchaur	Maya Chaudhary	(10+2) 2nd year	4	17	21
3	Loharpur	Jasoda Chaudhary	IEd pass (Bed running)	-	25	25
4	Solta	Dammar Subba	S.L.C. Pass	-	25	25
5	Phuleli	Pushpa Chaudhary	S.L.C. Pass (10+2) 2nd year	-	25	25
6	Sukumbasi Tole	Ganga Sharma	Intermediate Pass	1	28	29
	Sukumbasi Tole	Tika Sunar	8 Pass	5	26	31
Total				**10**	**213**	**223**

Source: data provided by Nepal buildOn Country Office

In the case of **Malawi**, among the 12 schools funded by Dubai Cares, only three were running ALP – namely Mpeka and Chankhwali in Kasungu and Jimbe in Neno. The location for the ALP courses in all communities visited was the schools built by buildOn. New ALPs will be started in April 2019 in seven of the schools in Kasungu. However, two schools, Chimwembe and Sathamapira in Mwanza, will not have ALP because of the phasing out of buildOn activities in the Southern part. As in Nepal, participants in the three ALP programs were enrolled during mass meetings where buildOn team used the mass meeting attendance list to identify those who used thumb-prints to sign.

At the time of the field-visits, the total number of participants enrolled in the ALP was 269; with 78 intending to write their final exams by end of March 2019. Out of 95 participants who started in Mpeka, 42 completed and received certificates of participation. The certificate is recognized by the local government and signed by the District Commissioner. We found that the retention rate is at 45 percent for the three centers (32% for men and 52% for women). Chankhwali has an exceptionally high rate of enrolment and dropout (71%), which is above the overall average of 55 percent. **Table 6** below provides enrollment, retention and drop-out details for each ALP Centre.

Table 6. ALP enrollment, retention and drop-out in Malawi's target communities.

ALP Enrolment for the 3 Schools-Malawi														
School Name	Enrolled			Graduated / to Complete			Retention Rate (%)			Drop-Outs			% Drop-Outs		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Mpeka	34	61	**95**	11	31	42	32%	51%	**44%**	23	30	**53**	68%	49%	**56%**
Chankhwali	56	48	**104**	14	16	30	25%	33%	**29%**	42	32	**74**	75%	67%	**71%**
Jimbe	8	62	**70**	6	42	48	75%	68%	**69%**	2	20	**22**	25%	32%	**31%**
Totals	**98**	**171**	**269**	**31**	**89**	**120**	**32%**	**52%**	**45%**	**67**	**82**	**149**	**68%**	**48%**	**55%**

Source: Group discussions/checklist with communities and facilitators

As there were discrepancies in the information provided by buildOn in relation to the enrolment numbers and dropout, the Evaluation Team opted to use the numbers provided in group discussions with communities and facilitators, even though these could not be verified in two of the centers because the facilitators had forgotten the registers at home. The reason for data inconsistency provided by buildOn staff is that ALP participants join the program at any point they wish, regardless of planned start-finish dates for the ALP. Continuous sensitization meetings are held to attract those who were initially reluctant to join the program, and as a result the data are always changing.

We found the facilitators' honoraria – important incentives for motivation – were the same for all target communities in Malawi, despite the distance and access. For example, facilitators in Chankhwali and Mpeka complained that the money is not enough as their monthly payment is reduced by 5,000 MWK (equivalent $7) because of the transport to get to buildOn office in Kasungu to collect the salary. Other challenges identified by ALP participants in Malawi include: a lack of textbooks required for practice at home and to avoid lapsing back into illiteracy; and the climate-related disruption to income generation activities such as goats dying in Chankhwali and soya beans cultivation hindered by dry weather in Mpeka.

A fraction of the total three-year budget is allocated to 'Community Education', including the costs of adult literacy classes, facilitators' remuneration, start-up income-generation activities; "in Nepal, the seed money is about USD 70 per group and in Malawi is about USD 200 per group" (KII-buildOn). Despite the low investment in this area, the results of the ALP are impressive. It should be noted, however, that our analysis of the effectiveness of buildOn's ALP relies entirely on information generated by our FGDs, due to the complete lack of routine project monitoring or impact assessment data; we discuss these data gaps in Section 2.3.4, below.

In the case of Nepal, the Evaluation Team found that literacy skills-acquisition impacted positively on women's lives in the following ways:

- In almost all the groups, women reported an increase in their confidence levels: "Before I was shy of saying 'Namaste' to outsiders, but not now!"; We feel we are important in the community now"; "I come to meetings now and I speak up"; "If there is a chance to join any group, or even to lead that group, I feel can do it"; "I used to keep silent in meetings, but now I want my daughters to be able speak out" (FGD-ALPN).

- Another dimension of perceived empowerment is women's participation in decisions to improve the life of the family, particularly in the area of health, sanitation and household hygiene. "We learned about the importance of safe drinking water and keeping the kitchen clean"; "Before, we went to the toilet in the jungle in a big group because we were afraid of the monkeys, but now we mostly have toilets at home" (FGD-ALPN).

- Participants feel they have the basic skills/knowledge to navigate the world and in their day-to-day lives. Previously illiterate women are now able sign their names and read basic texts, for example, newspaper headlines, lists of names in the hospital, and the price of commodities. One elderly mother who lives alone said, "I can recognize my son's name when he calls on the phone; he's far away, working in India". Participants are able keep simple accounts of their daily expenses. (FGD-ALPN).

- In some cases, ALP participants were able to access credit within the community and create small businesses: "I bought a tractor and now I rent it to raise money for the family; and then I opened a shop!"; "Our group started tailoring classes"; "We collected funds to start a Mother's Group"; "In my Savings and Credit Group, we increased our monthly savings from Rs 10/ to Rs 50/ per person".

Participants recognize the connection between school construction, enrolment of out-of-school children and the ALP: "Some children in the community were able to go to school for the first time and now our children start school on time because they don't have to walk so far to school"; "We speak to our sisters to encourage them to bring their children back to school (FGD-ALPN). While there is anecdotal evidence for the correlation between women's participation in ALP and children's enrolment and attendance in school, it is unfortunate that we were not able to refer to quantifiable data and present any kind of trend analysis. Of particular concern to many women in the ALP is the retention of adolescent children from poorer households; "Many older children, boys over 14, go to India to work as laborers" (FDG-ALPN).

Arguably the most significant change in participants' lives has been a new conviction that education has the power to transform lives. Participants in all our FGDs in Nepal asserted their raised awareness of the importance of children's schooling. "Now I don't ask my children to do household work, I check that they're doing their homework"; "I became aware of the importance of sending girls to school"; "When my daughter was small, I could help her with school work, but now I can't; I need to learn more to help my daughter, I need to learn more than her!" (FGD-ALPN).

Similarly, there is some evidence of a change in expectations following participation in the ALP: "Our next generation should not face problems; they should get jobs, earn money, not struggle like us" (FGD-ALPN). We note also a hunger for further learning: "I want to know how to speak English and read signs in English"; "I think our group should learn how to make bamboo furniture because some ex-*kamaiya* families do this and they make a lot of money" (FGD-ALPN).

In the Malawi context, too, ALP participants encourage their children to attend school and to be independent in the future. For example, Mpeka School enrolment continues to grow; the school currently has 608 students (313 F and 295 M) in grades 1-7, with 185 children in a single classroom in Grade 1, and the dropout rate is decreasing. The same scenario of increased enrolment and decreasing dropout applies to Jimbe and Chankhwali schools (see **Annex 8**). As in the case of ALP Nepal, women say there is better hygiene at home, with better planning of household activities and many are able to contribute to the household income.

This said, perhaps the greatest gap in terms of the ALP in both Malawi and Nepal is that it has reached very few male members of the community. In Malawi, the total for three centers were 98 male and 171 female participants. The reasons given for low male enrolment were "shyness" ; some participants in Jimbe said they were "bullied" and shamed because they did not know how to hold a pen; and some had competing responsibilities to bring household income (FGD-ALPM). The barrier of 'shyness' among men is addressed in two ways. First, advocacy by buildOn staff, conducted during mass meetings for school construction, groundbreaking ceremonies, and ALP site selection has helped to reduce male community members' reluctance to participate in. Secondly, "by encouraging village chiefs to enroll in literacy classes, these local leaders both serve as positive role models, and use their traditional authority, as well as their membership of the Village Development Committee, to combat reluctance within the community to engage in the ALP" (SSI-bOM).

Similarly, in the Nepali target communities visited, only five percent of participants in the ALP are men. It appears that the link between adult learning on the one hand and, poverty reduction and increased household incomes on the other, remains weak. We found little evidence of ALP participation in terms of two key areas: solutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school; and actions/projects for overall community, as distinct from individuals', development.

Indeed, in almost all our discussion groups, the seasonal migration of potential adult learners, particularly men, was cited as the most persistent barrier, not only to participation in the ALP, but to community development in general; "Poor families do their best to save about Rs 15,000 (USD 136) for the bus tickets to India where there are reliable opportunities for work and for almost half of the year they work there; if the women are left behind, they also have to work to survive "(FGD-ALPN). Other identified barriers include persistently conservative attitudes and behavior with regard to menstruation and early marriage; the lack of electricity in some communities and water scarcity in most communities, both drinking water and irrigation for livestock fodder and agricultural income-generating activities; and fundamental problems such as landlessness. We note that these persistent barriers are all specific to Kailali and Kanchanpur Districts in the Far Western Region, indicating the limited extent to which buildOn's approach to the ALP, and community development in general, has been tailored to suit local contexts.

2.3.3. Overall, extent to which the activities were carried out in line with the original project design; and extent to which the changes were, generally, adequately discussed, documented, and justified.

Our foremost finding with regard to the above benchmark is that the program's intervention logic is not being used. The absence of a baseline for changes at output or outcome levels has constrained our ability to assess progress in terms of planned results. During this evaluation we were able to confirm that activities were indeed implemented under the action areas for the School Construction and Adult Literacy components, which are the two components supported by Dubai Cares. (We have previously discussed the efficiency of project implementation, in terms of resource use and timeliness – see Section 2.2).

However, the Evaluation Team was unable to assess the extent to which activities were carried out in line with the original program/project design simply because in each country case the design is unclear. At best, the program/project can be described as a collection of action areas under three project component headings, with activities (defined in the project budget template) implemented within an approximate three-year timeframe (presented in a GANTT chart). According to the buildOn 'Global Logic Model' these action areas are outlined below.

Component 1. SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION
- Action Area 1: Covenant signed by all community members prior to construction
- Action Area 2: Volunteer Work Days and Local Materials Collection
- Action Area 3: Project Leadership Committee

Component 2 ADULT LITERACY
- Action Area 1: Training of facilitators from the community
- Action Area 2: Classes using culturally relevant topics to teach literacy and numeracy
- Action Area 3: Engagement of adults to select projects which will effect village heath, school enrollment, or income generation

Component 3. ENROLL
- Action Area 1: Sensitization of community members around importance of education
- Action Area 2: Capacity building of community members

It is important to note that the buildOn intervention logic is marred by a 'missing middle' – none of the program/project documents provided by buildOn indicate the intended results at output or process output level (we discuss the buildOn Theory of Change further under 'Lessons Learned' and 'Recommendations').

We also found that the program/project design does not include any kind of change-management plan, or as mentioned earlier, a risk analysis/mitigation plan. In the absence of such documentation, and indeed without systematic documentation of any changes made, the Evaluation Team cannot clearly identify modifications to the program/project design, or comment on the extent to which any changes made were justified. The most we can do is to reiterate our finding in Section 2.1.5, highlighting the reluctance of the Home Office to permit changes initiated by Country Offices.

2.3.4. Extent to which the monitoring and evaluation plan of the program is sufficient.

Linked to the above findings – an incomplete intervention logic and program/project plan, and lack of a change-management/risk-mitigation plan – is the lack of a monitoring and evaluation plan. In the absence of this dimension of the buildOn methodology, as noted above, there is no monitoring baseline, there are no comprehensive data for performance monitoring, progress is not measured against planned targets, and there is no opportunity for learning from formative evaluation.

During the evaluation desk review, we identified three different sets of KPIs, which do not necessarily 'speak' to each other: these are found in the country-level log frames; the annual reports; and the global buildOn methodology (outcome-level indicators).

The Draft of buildOn Global Outcomes-Indicators was shared with the Evaluation Team; as a work in progress it is encouraging. However, our brief analysis of the draft suggests that these outcome indicators are problematic. Several of the outcomes require careful definition, for example: 'Ability to create solutions to improve one's own life or the life of the family/solutions to improve the quality of education at the school/ solutions to improve the quality of life in the community'; and 'Increased participation/actions by women in decisions which improve the life of the family'; and 'Ability of individuals to influence community decisions'. What 'solutions' and which types of 'decisions' are expected?

For several outcomes, the indicators themselves require a clearer demarcation, for example: 'Actions/decisions made by individuals/families to improve the life of the family' and 'Action/projects taken by community to improve the quality of life'. Some indicators will require a strong baseline, including: 'Change in expectations by community members for the growth/success of the school, the development of the community, the success of families' and 'Changes seen in life after participation in adult literacy'.

Finally, we also note that a wide range of methods will be required to measure these indicators, including: a household survey, focus groups with ALP participants, village leaders, women's groups, interviews with school principal, village leaders, local education authorities, and 'internal'' monitoring KPIs. The methodology outlined by buildOn in this document is comprehensive, but will require substantial human and financial resource investment.

The lack of a coherent monitoring framework, designed for use at global, country and school-community level is a significant operational constraint at multiple levels. At field level, as Country Office staff in Malawi observed, "The monitoring system is weak and needs to be strengthened" (SSI-bOM); plans are underway to recruit an M&E team of three staff members who are also engineers. Country Office staff in Nepal also assert that "There is no monitoring system in place" (SSI-bON). Moreover, "We find monitoring difficult because of our workload; our priority is getting activities done, not looking back on how well we have done" (SSI-bON). While enrolment and daily attendance data are available, measuring the following KPIs for adult literacy is particularly challenging.

- Learning Gains: Assessment of participants' learning outcomes;
- Village Initiatives: changes made to the community measured by outputs (e.g. trees planted, latrines dug, micro-finances loans, amount of income generated) (buildOn, 2016).

The ALP in Nepal is monitored through field-visits by buildOn staff, which appear to be ad hoc. In terms of assessment of learning outcomes, there is no standard exam. Ongoing literacy tests are intended to be run at different stages of the program, but we found no evidence of this. Nepal Country staff agreed that "It would be really good to have a better idea of the impact of ALP, particularly on out of school children; what are the people really learning in the ALP? Some sort of analytical adult literacy and community development report would be very useful and would help us see how to improve what we are doing" (SSI-bON). In the case of Malawi, ALP KPIs include presence, percentage increase, variance, action plan, number of clubs, number of visits, Field Facilitator-participant ratio. These are found limiting and "not allowing for proper monitoring and reporting on village initiatives and impacts on the community and school" (SSI-bOM).

The constraints at field level are recognized by Dubai Cares Program Managers. "We know from our own field visits that school construction and adult literacy are worth investing in, but they [buildOn staff] don't know how to capture change" (KII-DC). At this level, too, ALP is viewed as being particularly challenging: "We demand a lot from buildOn; would like to see numbers as well as qualitative results" (KII-DC).

Dubai Cares donors are owed two types of reports: progress reports and end-project reports. In the case of progress reports, a complaint shared by all Program Managers is that 'reporting is copy-paste; I would like to see this changing' (KII-DC). End-project reporting is highly centralized: "for information on impact and sustainability we must ask the buildOn HQ"(KII-DC) However, communication between Dubai Cares and buildOn is "inconsistent, with information being provided piecemeal in response to specific questions, or we face delays in getting information we need" (KII-DC). The experience of the Evaluation Team was similar.

There is an assumption at field-level that robust program/project monitoring is not a priority "because buildOn donors are not interested in numbers, they just want to see photos and success stories" (SSI-bON). Indeed, the Dubai Cares Communications Department would like to see more 'human interest' stories; it seems that 'Ambassador donors' (who raise funds from businesses/corporations) and 'Chapter donors' (who target their own universities and schools) may not require detailed monitoring results (SSI-TREK). But this is not the case for 'donor stewardship', where previous volunteers take on the responsibility for raising funds from within their networks; 'TREK volunteers often ask, 'does buildOn measure the impact of activities, how has the project, impacted student learning?'; my answer is: currently, no" (SSI-bON).

In discussion with Nepal Country Office staff, we found that insufficient monitoring of the program/project may be because: "there's not enough manpower or technical capacity in buildOn, *or* we haven't properly defined the changes we want to see; *or* buildOn wants to stick with the formula of build-and-handover and isn't so committed to a process of community development. Or it might be a bit of all of these" (SSI-bON). Yet there is a perceived need to "make long-term impact analysis part of project monitoring" (SSI-bON). An interesting suggestion from the Nepal TREK Manager is, assuming data were collected systematically and routinely: "data could be analyzed by us between June-August, when we are not in the field and have time to review the data and identify solutions (SSI-bON).

The future strategies for 2019-2021 show that buildOn as an organization is well aware of the inadequacy of its monitoring plan and activities. The Evaluation Team are encouraged by the following examples are extracted below from the buildOn Strategic Plan (which we will discuss these further in relation to our 'Recommendations').

- Use outcomes identified in the Global Logic Model to evaluate the long-term impact of programs;
- Evaluate programs globally to ensure methodology compliance and country-specific curriculum focused on buildOn logic model outcomes;
- Use Logic Model and Indicators to relaunch an [internal] Impact Evaluation, to ensure internal learning and to attract additional donors to join the movement (buildOn Strategic Plan 2019-2021).

2.3.5. Availability of a system and mechanisms to ensure accountability to the target groups; how well it worked.

During in-depth interviews with Dubai Cares staff, Program Managers identified a tension between the learning function of M&E and 'accountability'. While buildOn USA demonstrates its accountability to its donors in terms of presenting overall achievements at the close of the project, "accountability is all about reporting to donors, not to us as Program Managers" (KII-DC). Indeed, as suggested in our discussion of program/project M&E, the present evaluation can confirm that "the learning function of accountability is very weak"(KII-DC). As one Dubai Cares Program Manager put it, "I'm very frustrated by the reporting because it is a marketing exercise for buildOn, even though there is so much evidence of achievements on the ground" (KII-DC).

In our engagement with the target communities, the Evaluation Team explored the learning dimension of accountability; that is: 'having clear lines of responsibility, knowing when those lines are broken, knowing what to do when something is going wrong, and taking action to right that wrong' (UNESCO 2018). At Country-level, we found that in both Malawi and Nepal the accountability of target communities to buildOn is taken very seriously. Accountability at community-level begins with the Covenant, which sets in stone the clear lines of responsibility, in terms of contributions from the community and buildOn; in group discussions in Malawi and Nepal community members echoed this assertion: "we were aware of our responsibilities from the beginning" (FGD-SCN). Emanating from the Covenant is a long list of structures, tools and processes intended to ensure that the community can be held accountable to buildOn. In the case of Malawi, buildOn Country Office staff identified the following:

- The PLC as a structure is set up to oversee and manage project activities, reporting to both buildOn and the community at large;
- Training provided to PLC members, to ensure the effective onsite use of construction materials;
- Monitored weekly meetings of the PLC, local leaders and buildOn Field Coordinators to report on the construction status; in Malawi these meetings are held on Friday or Saturday, excepting for Chimwembe (Mwanza) where the meetings did not take place;
- A volunteer attendance book, to monitor community contributions in terms of labour;
- A list of materials provided/procured by the community, which are counted one by one.

However, while accountability mechanisms have been set up at community level, dialogue and decision-making is largely one-way: the community is being held accountable to buildOn. As we have seen, in Section 2.1.4, "we knew what we were supposed to contribute local materials and labour, but it was a big burden (FGDs-SCN/ALPN)". Where communities faced challenges, the support offered by buildOn was limited by the terms of the Covenant – the project's main accountability mechanism – itself.

While target communities know what their responsibilities are and know what it expected from them, the accountability of BuildOn to the communities is not transparent: "we have no idea of buildOn financial contributions and don't ask for it either" (FGD-SCM). Indeed, the global HQ state: "it is not in our methodology to share the cost of materials with the community … [i]nstead, we share the quantities of materials and ask for the community partnership in tracking materials (KII-buildOn).

On the one hand, "we trusted PLC and we could see for ourselves the progress in school construction" (FGD-SCM); in 50 percent of the school sites visited in Malawi (Chanthipwi, Chankhwali and Chimwembe), the cost of materials procured by buildOn was not shared. In fact, there is a gap on the engagement of communities on procurement of materials to ensure sustainability. The Evaluation Team noted discrepancies in the actual cost of classrooms blocks against the planned budget for construction materials which is almost the same for all schools built in the same year; for instance, Chipoza School said the cost was MWK 12 million per block while in Chimwembe it was MWK 16 million (FGD-SCM)

Similarly, we asked FGD participants in Nepal to discuss the transparency of the school design and construction budget. Some responses are listed below:

- "The contribution of buildOn is on the plaque on the outside wall, though we don't know exactly the breakdown costs of the building";
- "Teachers knew it would be a three-room building, but the design was not? shared with the community; the budget was not clear at the beginning of the project or during construction";
- "We were frustrated and complained that the budget (cost of local materials and labour) was not shared; if we were involved in procurement we could have looked for discounts on non-local materials from local venders";
- "We were happy with the construction process – the time for construction was so quick! - the quality of materials and the budget was shared with us";
- "We did not know we could ask to see the budget; but it was shared the end of the project when we had public hearing of the financial expenditures [Social Audit]".

In addition, local government offices are considered key partners by buildOn, particularly for the construction of school buildings. Yet we found that neither the DEMOs in Malawi nor the rural municipalities in Nepal had been engaged throughout the project-cycle. According to the Covenant, local government are expected to provide teachers, curriculum, learning materials and, in some cases, local materials and to manage the school in partnership with the community (buildOn, 2016). But this involvement is by and large post-construction.

As one DEMO in Malawi put it, reiterating the views of rural municipality officials in Nepal, "government officials should also be involved at all stages of the project, participating in meetings during construction; we need to see how the project is supposed to develop" (SSI-LG). Moreover, "the meetings and discussions with buildOn should take place at different levels, and not only with the boys [meaning Field Coordinators] in Mwanza" (SSI-LG). The global methodology states that community leaders are "trained ... in holding the government officials accountable and in cases where community leaders are unsuccessful in securing the resources promised in the Covenant, buildOn staff intervene by leveraging future school construction projects". But perhaps the inclusion of local government actors in dialogue structures and decision-making processes would be a better way of ensuring mutual accountability.

This leads us to a crucial finding, pertaining to overall programming: decision-making in the buildOn organizational hierarchy is centralized. In the case of Nepal, buildOn-Nepal was originally registered as an INGO with an office in Kathmandu; "as former Country Director, I found that previously board members were scattered and not very active; I thought this structure cannot work, so I reformed the Executive Board and now we work more closely with the project" (SSI-bON). Moreover, in line with new legislation stipulating that an INGO cannot directly implement projects but must work through a local NGO, buildOn Nepal was re-registered as a local NGO in the Far Western Region. At the end of the day, however, we are "just implementing partners for the buildOn home office; most decisions about our work in the community are made in the USA" (SSI-bON).

Indeed, every year the buildOn Home Office requests its country teams to submit priority recommendations for the global 'strategic plan'. The following recommendations [edited for language] were submitted by buildOn Nepal:

- Improve the buildOn methodology by introducing flexible criteria for new site selection, Basic/Secondary school construction, and community contributions.
- Enhance the ALP through better income-generation/livelihood skills development courses.
- Reduce dropout rates by conducting enrolment campaigns with the help of local leaders; increasing investment in teaching-learning materials; and investing in SWASH and electricity in schools.
- Enhance individual Country Office staff skills and capacities (department wise); and create a global learning platform for staff to share ideas and working methods.
- Work as a pilot model with other partners and evaluate its impact; and Support non-buildOn schools and communities through outreach.
- Adhering to buildOn policies, create a methodology for [formative] evaluation and conduct internal audits from time to time. (Source: documents share by Nepal Country Office staff).

Country Office staff believe, however, that "none of these have really been taken on board" (SSI-bON).

2.4. SUSTAINABILITY

2.4.1. Extent to which school buildings are owned and maintained by the communities.

As we have seen above, the buildOn Covenant plays a central role in community mobilization, as a foundation for project monitoring, and as an accountability mechanism. The Covenant is also viewed as a means of creating tenure of the school by the community, based as it is on the assumptions that community contributions ensure their ownership. In both Malawi and Nepal, we found the Covenant had generated a strong sense of ownership of the school by the community.

During our group discussions in target communities in Nepal and Malawi, the Evaluation Team reviewed communities' commitments as laid out by the Covenant. As outlined below, we found that the majority of commitments had been fulfilled:

1. ***Commitment to educating boys and girls equally.*** All target communities assert there is no disparity, all respondents agreeing on the importance of educating both boys and girls. This is evidenced by enrolment data.
2. ***Unskilled labour for the construction provided equally between men and women with the willingness for the worksite contribution of women to break traditional gender roles***. Unskilled labour was provided by all target communities, evidenced by volunteer labour records; however, most volunteers were women due to the seasonal migration of male workers to India.
3. ***The land on which the school will be built.*** In all target communities the school was constructed on government-owned land; confirmed by field observation.
4. **High quality local materials.** Overall the quality of the both local and non-local materials was satisfactory; confirmed by field observation. This said, in one case, almost all residents of the community are *Dalit* (low scheduled caste) and *Mukta Kamaiya* and were unable to contribute local materials; here, local materials such as stone, aggregate, sand, and wood, were contributed by the school purchasing materials on credit from local venders (with an outstanding debt of Rs 160,000/USD 1,455). In other cases, high-quality local materials was achieved in a variety of ways: teachers' donations from their salaries; a factory provided some bricks; the PLC chair donated Rs 10,000; households contributed wheat/rice; the school borrowed Rs 40,000 from the Mother's Group. As a last resort, funds were provided by the Rural Municipality.

5. ***Project management through a Leadership Committee.*** In all target communities, the PLC was elected; but was formed only for the purpose of school construction and was dissolved when construction was completed. There was no further engagement because neither support training was provided, nor follow-up mobilization for continued community development; evidenced by the FGD data.

6. ***Lodging for BuildOn team: Field Coordinator, skilled labourers, and visiting Trek Teams.*** Lodging was provided for all visiting volunteers and other staff, with some compensation received from buildOn evidenced by the FGD data.

7. ***Safe storage of the materials while on site.*** All target communities provided onsite space for safe storage of materials; evidenced by PLC records.

8. ***Commitment to enrolling all children of school age.*** Target communities acknowledge the importance of enrolling children of school age; community members awareness is undermined by the contextual realities of seasonal migration and other barriers related to poverty; evidenced by the FGD data.

However, a final commitment is that school-communities are also required to ***maintain the school after the project is completed.*** A central finding from the point of view of sustainability, is that there is little awareness among the target communities in Nepal of the requirement for an operation and maintenance (O&M) fund, and no collection mechanism; in our case study school (Shree Garima School, in K Gaun, Kailali), for example, the walls, steps and water and sanitation block needs maintenance, however funds were not mobilized by either the SMC or the community. Indeed, none of the schools we visited had set up and O&M fund. In Malawi too, we found no evidence of an operation and maintenance (O&M) mechanism in most of the schools. Some communities said they are using School Improvement Program (SIP) funds from the government and community/parental contributions to maintain the school. Others are looking at ways to come up with a strategy such as fundraising for maintenance (FGD-SCM).

We have three important findings in relation to sustainable school construction. First, during school construction, the PLCs in Malawi and Nepal proactively introduced measures – such as regular meetings after 5 pm – to ensure they functioned well as a team. But in both countries, we found that target communities had a limited understanding of their responsibility for maintaining the school after the project is completed and buildOn has exited its partnership with the community.

According to the buildOn Global methodology, the PLC is intended to handover responsibility to the SMC. In Malawi, for example, the DEMO assumed that school maintenance is the responsibility of the SMC/PTA, supported by the Village Development Councilors, Area Development Committees, and Primary Education Advisors (PEDs) (see **Box 6**).

Box 6. Decentralization as driving force for education reform in Malawi

The Government of Malawi (GoM) adopted a National Decentralization Policy in 1998 with the aim to improve the targeting of resources to those most in need, and to devolve decision-making closer to the schools. This legislation assigns to the districts the responsibility for the delivery of primary education. Primary Education Advisors are responsible for supervision of and support to primary schools and the continuing professional development of teachers. However, the national Ministry of Education, Science & Technology (MoEST) retains the overall responsibility for the education sector. The very title of Malawi's Education Sector Implementation Plan II (2013/14- 2017/18), 'Toward Quality Education: Empowering the School', indicates the importance of decentralization in the national sector context (GoM, 2014). Under this plan, autonomy in primary education planning and implementation of priorities, together with resources, has been given to the school level. All 3,754 primary schools in the 24 districts (there are 28 districts and 5,415 registered primary schools in Malawi) have been receiving a grant for the implementation of School Improvement Plans (SIP). Funds have been disbursed directly into the school's bank accounts in the course of the 2012-13 financial year. Primary schools are mandated to allocate 40% of this school budget to activities relating to access, 50% to quality and 10% to governance (GoM, 2014).

In the highly decentralized context of Nepal, too, the assumption is that "the municipality and the community are one and the same, so both are responsible for making sure the school keeps going through the SMC" (SSI-RM). Yet there is no mechanism or process– clear lines of responsibility – established within a buildOn project whereby school-communities can rely on local government procedures to ensure the delivery of quality teaching and learning, or to follow up on gains made in adult learning and community development.

Secondly, both the PLCs and, in the longer term, the SMCs would benefit from better dialogue with local government: "The rural municipality does not always hear us; we make many requests, but they are not heard" (FGD-SCN). Related to this is the need for capacity building for the PLC, SMC and target communities in general. The PLC is supposed to receive training ''to facilitate meetings, keep records of both meetings and construction materials, resolve conflicts, motivate community members to participate in the project, and sensitize their fellow community members to bring all school-aged children to school regardless of gender, ethnic group, caste, or socio-economic status" (buildOn, 2016). In the Case of Nepal, we found evidence of some, but not all, of such training activities.

In the case of Malawi, the following capacity-building took place:

- The PLCs were trained in the management of materials, record keeping of volunteers, time management and group dynamics; as a result, "PLCs are able to mobilize materials for two school blocks every year and two artisans have been promoted as official buildOn artisans" for Chanthipwi, Chankhwali, Chimwembe and Jimbe (FGD-SCM).

- The Adult Literacy committee (sub-group of the PLC) were trained in group dynamics, leadership, management of teaching and learning resources, conflict resolution, tracking of absenteeism, loan management skills, and identification of Village Initiative opportunities (FGD-ALPM);

- SMC, PTA, Mothers' Groups received orientation on their roles and responsibilities for following up school attendance and absenteeism provided by the local government/Primary Education Advisor (PEA); as result in the Mothers' group in Chimwembe "managed to bring 10 dropouts back to school" (FGD-SCM).

- Overall, various community committees (PLC, ALC, ALP facilitators) received training which equipped them to perform their duties well and there is a strong believe that with the experience gained they will be able to sustain the activities that have been initiated.

Some examples of useful capacity building activities, which would contribute to the sustainability of buildOn project gains, are Training of Trainers (ToT) in: "multi-grade/multi-age teaching; basic/advance participatory learning assessment (PLA); report writing and story-telling/writing; construction training for field coordinators; longer-term income-generation/Village Initiative training linked to available vocation education and training providers; and last but not least, post-school construction community mobilization" (SSI-bON). In both Nepal and Malawi, Country office staff usefully suggested that training interested and committed community members to engage in project monitoring, would generate a greater community commitment to sustaining the projects' gains. A further sensible suggestions is ""where the budget is not enough, Home Office should *build on* existing training opportunities by building partnerships wherever we can" (SSI-bON).

Our third finding is that, overall, a complex dynamic exists in terms of ownership. Both those who have 'adopted' the school (donors and international volunteers) as well as the communities who benefit, refer 'our school'. Generally, the schools we visited were identified as "buildOn schools"; as Nepal Country Staff point out, "The school is supposed to be owned by the community but buildOn says, 'this is a buildOn school'; when someone says this is 'our'' school, the ownership of that school is not clear" (SSI-bON). Yet, as we will see below, in the longer term, ownership of schools by local government actors is somewhat lost in the equation.

2.4.2. Extent to which the school construction programs are aligned with and integrated into local education plans, including financial resources allocated.

During our FGDs in Malawi and Nepal, we discussed buildOn's assertion that it "empowers the community to build on to the strengths, experience and wisdom that already exist". We found that, overall, change is indeed triggered by a spirit of volunteerism and a school can become the focus of the community meetings, catch-up classes, and a catalyst for development, "money spend brings added value to the communities" (SSI-bOM). The buildOn methodology "has brought the community together to reach a common goal" (FGD-SCM) and through the ALP "women are able to participate in decision-making and take up leadership positions" (FGD-APLM).

We found communities consider they have been empowered through their participation in the buildOn program, which has strengthened their knowledge and experience, enabling them to do better in subsequent construction activities; "we know how to construct school blocks with community participation, how much material should go into one block to make it durable and how to bring about development" (FGD-SCM).

In Malawi, target communities are even consulted by other communities on buildOn methodology and can explain it well; "participation, teamwork, and discipline are capacities gained that have brought more unity to the communities and buildOn has brought more children to school" (FGD-SCM). These are all gains also evidenced by our findings in Nepal. At the same time, we note a question raised by the mayor of a rural municipality: ''Yes, it is good to make use of strength, experience and wisdom that already exists; but is change only triggered from outside? Why not also *build on* the strength of the relationship of communities and local government?'' (SSI-RM).

This leads us to an important finding: the buildOn methodology overall lacks a clear exit strategy. For example, in the case of Malawi, on the one hand, we found that the buildOn projects align well with national priorities, particularly the drive to reduce the pupil-classroom ratio, and the construction of classrooms contributes to the government's efforts to achieve national targets (see **Box 7**). According to the Malawi Country Office staff, "20% of classrooms in Kasungu are buildOn products and as the ALP is in line with the national adult literacy program", it is certified by the local authorities (SSI-bOM). As a result, every school constructed by buildOn has received full support from district-level education offices and, as in Nepal, local authorities provide teachers when requested by the communities for newly opened schools.

On the other hand, we found no specific exit strategy in place in Malawi and while the buildOn methodology indicates there should be an MoU between the DEMO and the NGO, we could not find any evidence of such an agreement; buildOn participates in District Education Committee (DEC) meetings in Kasungu but not in Mwanza. While communities are usually informed when buildOn's support ends, this was not the case in Mwanza and Neno, where communities were not aware of the intended phasing out of buildOn project in Mwanza/Neno and the rest of the southern region (though they will continue in Kasungu "for at least another 10 years" (SSI-bOM).

Box 7. Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP II) Strategies
The following outlines key NESP policies and operational strategies that are of relevance to the buildOn program in Malawi.
Policy1. Ensure that 50% of children reach Standard 4 literacy and numeracy levels by 2017.
▪ *Relevant Strategy: Classroom availability:* An annual target of 1,500 classrooms is also aspired to, in order to reach a 90:1 Pupil Classroom Ratio by 2017/18, with special priority given to classrooms for lower standards.
Policy2. Attain a motivated, high –performing teacher staff
▪ *Relevant Strategy: A comprehensive teacher motivation strategy* shall be adopted to ensure more comprehensive and transparent teacher promotion routes and offer clearer disciplinary measures, especially related to teacher attendance. ESIP II will ensure teachers are deployed where needs are highest and introduce a one-off redeployment of teachers from urban to rural areas. To incentivize placements in rural areas and hard-to-fill posts, more teachers' houses will be built.
Policy4. Improved management/resource delivery through higher school funding and decentralized procurement of teaching and learning materials
▪ *Relevant Strategy: School-based management* will be strengthened through additional funding for the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP) and improving the capacity of Schools Management Committees (SMCs), and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) on management, finance and procurement.
The ESIP-II highlights that classroom construction has not increased in line with enrolments, and the number of pupils per classroom is far from the government target of 90 learners per classroom; and the average primary student to classroom ratio (PCR) has increased from 105:1 in 2011/2012 to 124:1 in 2012/13. As response to these capacity constraints, Malawi's Ministry of Education implemented a construction program through the Local Development Fund (LDF)[4] in the second part of the 2011-12 financial year. At the end of 2012-13 progress of this first round of LDF construction was rated at 95%.
Source: GoM, 2014

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[4] The Local Development Fund was established in 2009 in accordance with the Public Finance Management Act, 2003, and aims to ensure sufficient, harmonised and decentralised development funding for local authorities and achievement of improved development outcomes at local and community level. LDF is funded from 4 sources: (a) the World Bank through the MASAF IV Project with funds amounting to US$107 million supporting interventions in the Community Window; Local Authority; and Performance Window; (b) The African Development Bank through the Local Economic Development Project (US$25.7million) supporting the Community Window; Urban Window and the Performance Window; (c) German support to Urban Window through the KfW (US$15 million); and (d) Government's annual commitments, with the current commitment at MK3.2 billion (Equivalent of US$8 million).

This said, we did find that several innovative activities had been initiated by the target communities in Malawi, to ensure sustainability of the gains made. Some examples are:

- In Mpeka, the community has sought additional support from other donors: "The NGO Press trust has promised an additional classroom block; additional borehole to cover for the whole community as the existing one is not sufficient" (FGD-SCM). Their ambition is to have a full primary school and bring in a secondary school with additional NGO support (the closest one is seven km away) and have more educated people in the area. They have already registered for literacy program starting in April 2019. There are 210 potential candidates and the expectation on how to read and write and how to speak English is high.

- The construction of teachers' housing is a priority for the Chimwembe community as teachers travel from far away and are sometimes late or do not come at all; "we have started mobilizing materials, but we know that we may not be able to do it all at once" (FDG-SCM).

- In Chankhwali and Jimbe, the communities aim to construct additional blocks for the school to offer the full primary-cycle (Grades 1-8); additionally they intend to build 12 teacher's houses and a school hall in Chankhwali through a combination of mobilizing their own funds and approaching other NGOs for resources; in Jimbe "we are collecting bricks (now we have 170,000), our village bank account has a balance of 86,000 MWK (the target is to reach 1 million and we are now looking for a loan), and our number of goats has gone up from 9 to 19" (FGD-SCM).

- In Chipoza, the community has started "putting three-year plans and budgets in place for future community development, including the construction of more school blocks and staff houses and bringing electricity to the school for computer lessons" (FGD-SCM); they are also moving to start ALP in April 2019 and already have 147 potential candidates and two facilitators.

In the case of Nepal, the exit strategy to ensure the school is operational after buildOn support is phased out is simply a handover of the school to the community through a formal letter. Unlike the communities in Malawi, while after handover the community is required to take on full responsibility for school maintenance, we found that no target communities had plans in place to sustain the school once BuildOn support ended. Rather, the general strategy is to reach out to local government. "In the case of Krishnapur Municipality, we have allocated 4100,000 NER for communities to hire contract teachers, while we procure text books, desks and chairs"(SSI-RM). Much depends, however, on leadership; in Janahit Bal Primary School, a dynamic headmaster has plans to approach multiple donors to improve and upgrade the school; and the SMC chair in Sukumbasi Tole plays an important role as a community facilitator.

Similarly, we found no evidence for an ALP exit strategy. While ALP participants in most Nepali target communities asserted that "we want to continue literacy classes, but we don't have a plan and we can't continue without external financial support"' (FGD-ALPN). Indeed, there was limited awareness of post-basic literacy opportunity, provided by either local government or other NGOs. In Solta, Kailali, 140 families requested the rural municipality for support to continue ALP. Again, leadership is important, with one SMC chair committing to mobilizing funds for income-generation activities; "we should not stop now!" (FGD-ALPN).

While Nepal has a history of participatory planning (see **Box 8**), a key constraint is that there is no process whereby buildOn school construction is officially integrated into local education plans. The former Country Director for Nepal argues that previously the relationship with local government was a strong one: "the district office provided school buildings and buildOn did the toilets" (SSI-bON). At present, contact between buildOn and the rural municipalities is through the target communities; "We establish our partnership with the communities, then they inform municipality and if they can finance the community contribution, build on sometimes makes up the balance". Arguably one of the greatest challenges for buildOn in Nepal is its limited engagement with local government; "the rural municipality should be part and parcel of the partnership between buildOn and the community" (SSI-bON). Clearly, the way forward is a 'tripartite' partnership: "With the full engagement of local government, there would be no need for financial contributions for the community" (SSI-bON).

> **Box 8 The participatory planning process in Nepal**
>
> Citizen participation in governance has been one of the consistent reform strategies in Nepal since 1990, when the Panchayat system, a form of party-less democracy ruled by the King, was transformed into multiparty liberal democracy. Following the 2017 local elections, 'local governments' have been introduced, with unprecedented powers to exercise executive, judiciary and legislative powers at the local level. With the introduction the Local Self Governance Act of 1999, the participatory planning process is envisaged as a routine process taking place from November to February every year, monitored by the federal government.
>
> Local bodies are relatively autonomous in terms of the institutional design, procedures of deliberation, and the extent to which public deliberations were linked to actual policy decisions. The participant selection process for participatory planning varies across different villages, municipalities and districts. In some municipalities, strong community based organizations such as the Tole Lane Organizations (TLOs) have their own rules and regulations to select participants through community elections. In other, relatively new municipalities, existing community-based organizations (CBOs) such as Mothers' Groups are invited to take part in the participatory planning process. In other situations, Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs), or Civic Awareness Centres (CACs), are set up, with WCF members being chosen (not elected) by the community.
>
> *Source*: author's own research

In our discussion with the rural municipalities, we found that buildOn activities could certainly be integrated the local development plans. Indeed, the By-Law of October 2017 states that "any INGOs registered at federal or local level should work in close collaboration with municipal government, including collaborative planning" (SSI-RM). While there are variations between municipalities, generally ordinary citizens engage in planning and budgeting as follows.

First, the rural municipality communicates the policy and budget guidelines to the communities via the Ward Committee, and CBOs are invited to discuss these guidelines; the discussions take place in public venues and are open to anyone. The results of the discussions are then deliberated on in ward '*Bhela*'s – workshops in which selected representatives of CBOs justify their initial proposals. These workshops are also attended by interested ordinary people, local officials, political representatives and media.

Finally, the decisions of Ward-*Bhela* are then forwarded for review by the municipality. The proposals are revised, with inputs from the Budget Advisory Committee, based on technical and financial viability and presented for approval by the Integrated Planning Formulation Committee (IPFC) which is comprised of all the representatives of sector departments, communities, NGOs, and so on. The IPFC's recommendations are endorsed, without revision, by elected authorities at the Municipal Council with the policies to be decided (SSI-RM).

Such a process is in fact followed by the rural municipality in Krishnapur; "Federal Government disburses an education sector lump sum and budget lines are decided at municipality level, based on needs defined at the village level, then discussed at ward level, and final decisions are made at municipality level, with reference to administrative (I-EMIS) data" (SSI-RM). In this scenario, the entry point for integrated planning would be the village level identification of community needs. However, "for this to work, buildOn planning needs to coincide with municipality planning timeline; as budget finalization takes place in mid-July, a final agreement would need to take place during December-April so that school could be constructed before monsoon" (SSI-bON). In the words of the Mayor of Krishnapur Rural Municipality:

> *"It would be good to do joint planning with communities selected for support by buildOn. This would lead to more financing for schools. For example, if buildOn committed to building three classrooms, the municipality could match this. It would also contribute to more flexible responses to communities' needs. For example, if buildOn commits to additional classrooms in an existing school to complete the Basic Education cycle, the municipality commits to constructing a sister-Lower Secondary School, or providing ECD facilities, or teachers' housing"* (SSI-RM)

Generally, the Evaluation Team found that the planned delivery of results and targets has been achieved, though the targets for ALP were partially achieved. The project has been effective and overall, schools were built quickly, and community engagement has enhanced ownership. Several significant results are highlighted by stakeholders in Malawi.

- Children are able to start school at an early age (5-6 years) as recommended by the government, compared to before when, due to long distances, they had to wait until the age of 9-12 years. The number of children going to school has increased, enrolment is more equitable, and the number of dropouts has decreased. The pupil-classroom ratio has improved. The learning environment has improved considerably, as classroom-based teaching and learning allows children to concentrate better; improved sanitation with latrines has ameliorated school absenteeism.

- The school blocks have enabled the introduction of ALP, the communities are very happy with the newly-acquired abilities to write, read and count and there are strong demands for advanced literacy courses. Women's participation in leadership positions has increased; some are treasurers, PLC secretaries and SMC Chairs. Neo-literate ALP participants are offered positions to participate in, or lead, church Development Committees, church Women's Groups, Village banking and the mobile under-five clinics.

- The learning ambiance has been improved; schools are now beautiful places and have become centres for other community development activities, including: 'Vote pole'; under-five clinic consultations; school feeding programs; tree planting and forestry management; and community sports activities. Increased community ownership of the schools has reduced vandalism.

- Communities have learned how to engage with other donors and mobilize resources for community development.

- The project has highlighted *opportunities* to increase buildOn staff's capacities to manage the project and to work in teams and with local government departments and other NGOs.

As **Figure 1** shows, the above achievements resonate with our findings from targeted communities in Nepal.

Figure 1. Indicative positive changes from Nepal

42
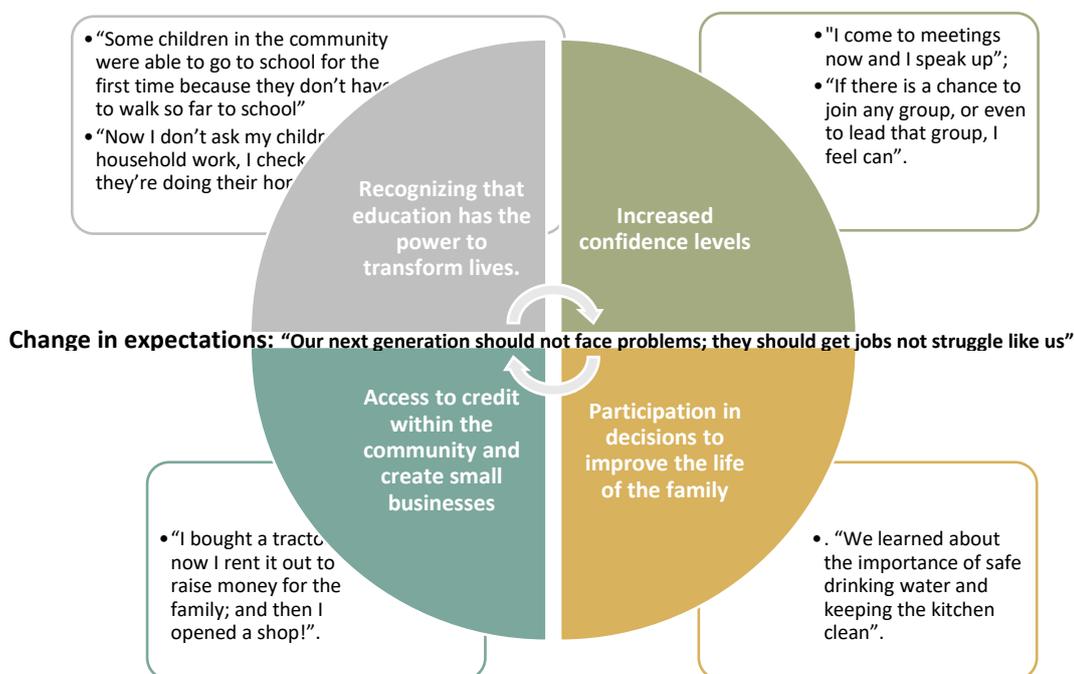
Notwithstanding these positive achievements, the following conclusions are drawn from a series of inter-related provisional hypotheses, generated by our desk review.

1. In terms of **relevance**, the buildOn model for community-based development may benefit from greater conceptual coherence and more country-specific operational linkages between the model's components (i.e. school building, adult literacy and community engagement).

- The Evaluation team confirm this hypothesis, particularly with regard to buildOn's approach to 'community engagement', pointing towards better engagement with local government, as well as ensuring the ALP is a platform for context-specific community development that reaches male as well as female community members. While the buildOn selection criteria are robust they could be improved. Future programming would benefit from steps in two related directions: a stronger, more supple, buildOn theory of change and a focused strategy within Dubai Cares' overall global mandate (This conclusion informs lessons learned 1.1, 1.3, 3.2, 3.3 and 4.3).

2. With increased investment in human resources within buildOn and by addressing technical capacity gaps at country and community levels, particularly for project monitoring, the **efficiency** of program implementation may be improved.

- We confirm this hypothesis, particularly with regard to project monitoring. We note that technical capacity gaps include the absence of an M&E plan, risk analysis/change-management plan. Human resource capacities gaps exist in several areas, including data analysis and use, and these gaps are not being filled by partnering with other related NGOs. Reporting is focus on accountability to donors, with little attention given to the learning dimension of MEL and the use of data to inform program management. (This conclusion informs lessons learned 1.6, 2.3 and 3.4)

3. From the perspective of accountability (i.e. 'having clear lines of responsibility, knowing when those lines are broken, knowing what to do when something is going wrong, and taking action to right that wrong'), greater responsiveness to emergent challenges may enhance program **effectiveness** and improve progress towards planned results.

- The Team confirm this hypothesis, noting that accountability mechanisms are primarily one-way and may be undermined by centralized decision-making. We also note that the buildOn Covenant is somewhat rigid, which is particularly problematic from the perspective of communities' and local governments' capacities to make their required contributions. (This conclusion informs lessons learned 1.4, 1.5. 2.2 and 3.1)

4. The model's **sustainability** could be strengthened by greater alignment with national education sector plans; and community ownership enhanced by embedding the model in local government / community development plans.

- We partially confirm this hypothesis. Alignment with national education sector plans is important for the sustainability of buildOn projects. But strong linkages to decentralized government decision-making and planning structures and processes are absolutely *essential*, particularly if the 'adopt-a-school' approach is to evolve as a scalable model for corporate social responsibility (CSR). We also note that a sustainable and scalable model requires greater attention to participatory planning, capacity-building for post-school construction dialogue with local government authorities and a clear and carefully considered exit strategy. At present, these are missing from the buildOn approach. (This conclusion informs lessons learned 2.1, 3.1, 4.1 and 4.2).

While the following recommendations draw on lessons learned from Malawi and Nepal, their broad aim is to strengthen buildOn's results-based programming overall. To tell a learning 'story', we have organized our recommendations to follow the 'flow' of the four main phases of a conventional project cycle: *Initiation*; *Planning*; *Execution* (including monitoring and performance management); and *Closure*.

We commend the positive steps already taken by buildOn in their development of strategies for 2019-2021; the evaluation's recommendations concur with several of these and may contribute to buildOn's ongoing efforts to chart a way forward. (An integrated table in **Annex 10** shows how our recommendations complement existing buildOn strategies, as well as lists those recommendations not yet reflected in buildOn's Strategic Plan.)

We note that some of the following recommendations – particularly for community development – imply significant additional resource investment. But the Evaluation Team's experience as development practitioners, as well as our own learning during this evaluation, lead us to conclude: if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

5.1. Prepare the ground.

We recommend that the overall project time-frame includes a designated inception period, to prepare the ground for the project. Time spent in pre-planning/planning will reduce the time required to deliver the project outputs. This preparatory (pre-planning/planning) phase will enable a range of activities to be undertaken, including the development of project-level operational plans; fine-tuning KPIs and process monitoring indicators; and setting a monitoring baseline with annual targets (which we discuss in further recommendations, below). It will also launch the buildOn partnership, ensuring the project's planned outputs align well with specific community needs as well as with local government priorities.

A key activity, however, should be a Country/region Situation Analysis, or Baseline Study to establish a strong foundation for the above preparatory activities . In particular, it will prepare Country Office Staff to respond to contextual challenges that inevitably arise during project implementation, guiding a project risk analysis. Such an analytical study may be a collaboration between potential target communities/groups and buildOn Country Staff; it may help to answer, for example, the following questions (see **Annex 6**):
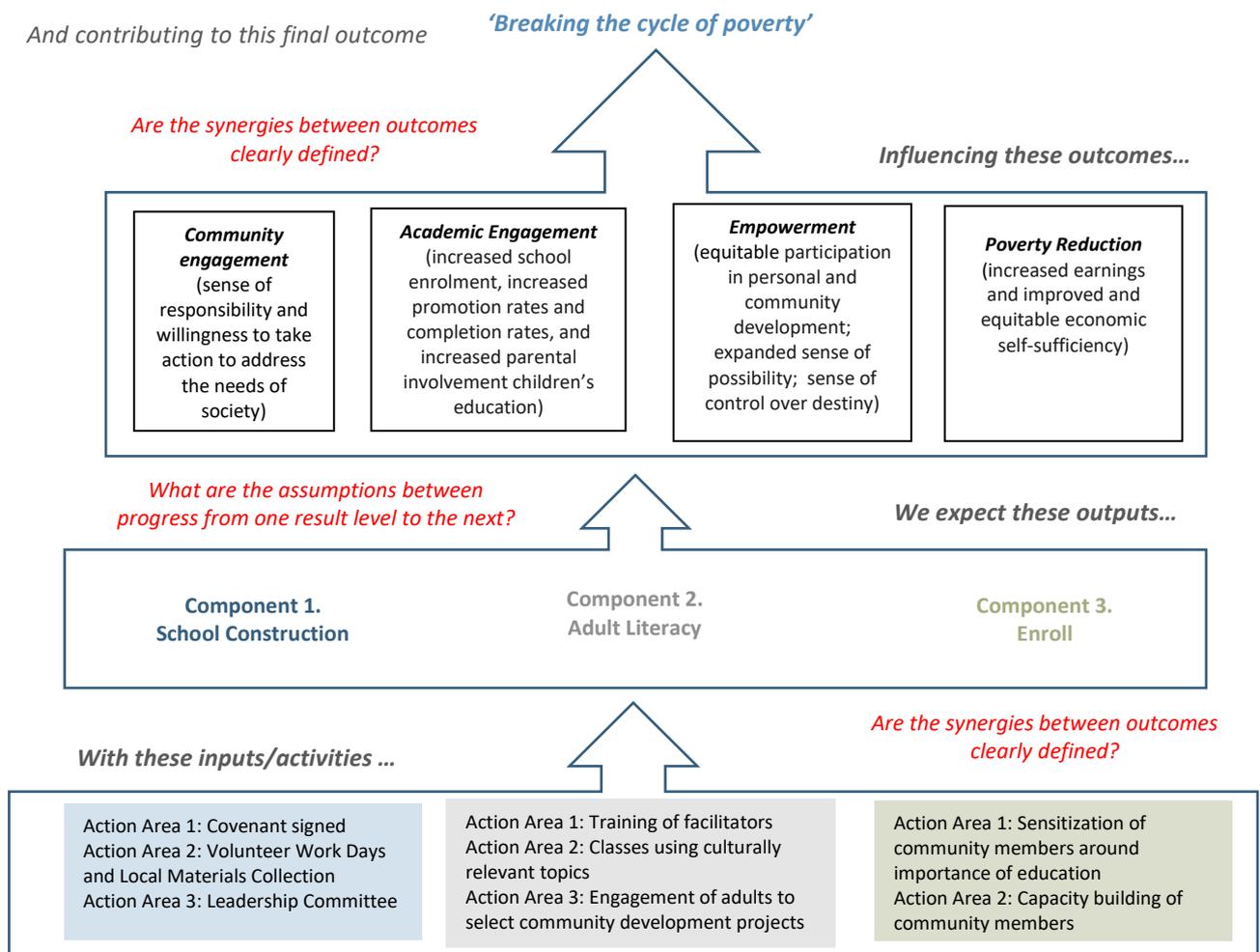
- What constitutes a 'community' in a given context; what are the different groups within the community; what are the power dynamics between groups and the inequities within a community; and which group(s) are most disadvantaged/marginalized?

- How does decentralization of education planning and service delivery actually work in the country/region context; what are the processes, opportunities and threats, whereby communities interact with local authorities?

- What are *specific* socio-cultural barriers that prevent girls' and boys' going to school and completing a primary cycle (e.g. persistent attitudes and behavior with regard to menstruation and early marriage); what barriers (particularly for men) prevent participation in adult learning and skills development?

- What poverty-related barriers (e.g. food security in Malawi, or landlessness and seasonal migration of low-income families in Nepal) are faced by households in the community? What are the impacts of climate change on communities?

We also recommend that the current Community Profile template is revisited, as it now focuses on the collection of information required to plan and implement TREK; and TREK materials are edited to ensure they are relevant to Dubai Cares' Global Volunteers.

5.2. Strengthen the buildOn Theory of Change.

As the global strategy states, buildOn intends to complete its ToC, or intervention logic by including outputs and establishing a baseline for changes at the levels of both outcomes and outputs. Putting together elements from the buildOn Global methodology and strategic planning documents, and drawing on our evaluation findings, we suggest the buildOn ToC might look something like **Figure 2**, below.

Figure 2. Indicative Theory of Change

And contributing to this final outcome　　　　　**'Breaking the cycle of poverty'**

Are the synergies between outcomes clearly defined?　　　　　*Influencing these outcomes…*

| **Community engagement** (sense of responsibility and willingness to take action to address the needs of society) | **Academic Engagement** (increased school enrolment, increased promotion rates and completion rates, and increased parental involvement children's education) | **Empowerment** (equitable participation in personal and community development; expanded sense of possibility; sense of control over destiny) | **Poverty Reduction** (increased earnings and improved and equitable economic self-sufficiency) |

What are the assumptions between progress from one result level to the next?　　　　　*We expect these outputs…*

| **Component 1. School Construction** | **Component 2. Adult Literacy** | **Component 3. Enroll** |

With these inputs/activities …　　　　　*Are the synergies between outcomes clearly defined?*

| Action Area 1: Covenant signed
Action Area 2: Volunteer Work Days and Local Materials Collection
Action Area 3: Leadership Committee | Action Area 1: Training of facilitators
Action Area 2: Classes using culturally relevant topics
Action Area 3: Engagement of adults to select community development projects | Action Area 1: Sensitization of community members around importance of education
Action Area 2: Capacity building of community members |

However, as **Figure 2** suggests, we strongly recommend further work in the following areas.

- Include intermediate outcomes/process outputs; these are useful for a global program as it allows for contextualization at country level and alignment between operational plans and the intervention/results logic (process outputs function as outcome-level results in country-level operational plans).

- Include a narrative description of the assumptions behind the intervention logic. Assumptions describe the internal or external conditions which must exist for the 'if-then' relationship between the different levels of results to behave as expected. As such, they are the linkages that bind together elements in an intervention logic or results chain, and they should be periodically tested during implementation.

- The horizonal linkages should explain the integrated programming logic and define the synergies between the program components explored (e.g. link between adult learning on the one hand and, poverty reduction and increased household incomes). The vertical linkages should explain how changes happen from one results level to the next.

- Use the ToC to inform the M&E plan; risk-mitigation strategies; change-management matrix for responsive planning, where progress against baseline targets for outcome and output-level indicators is reviewed and documented and the project/program is adjusted accordingly and changes to the program justified.

We also recommend that buildOn ensure the three-year strategic intervention logic is not set in stone, but is iterative as any good ToC should be.

5.3. Move along a 'continuum of community engagement'.

We recommend optimal use of the Covenant by focusing more on its function as a tool for community engagement and less as an accountability mechanism. It is important the Covenant continues to clarify the respective responsibilities of buildOn, communities and local government, as well as articulating the buildOn model of partnership. But it is equally important that, *as a process*, the Covenant is a two-way exchange of information; it should allow partners to negotiate and fine-tune the details of their commitments, in line with the Situation Analysis findings (see Recommendation 5.1). Finally, it is essential that local government decision-makers participate in the process, and are not merely kept informed; specific decentralized government planning priorities and their capacities (e.g. the funds available to pay teachers' salaries) should be taken into account.

In short, as illustrated by **Figure 3**, a less rigid, process-oriented Covenant may enable country-level projects to move along the continuum of community engagement. And the results of the Covenant-driven discussion – ideally held during the preparatory phase - can be used to inform operational project plans and budgets.

Figure 3. A continuum of community engagement
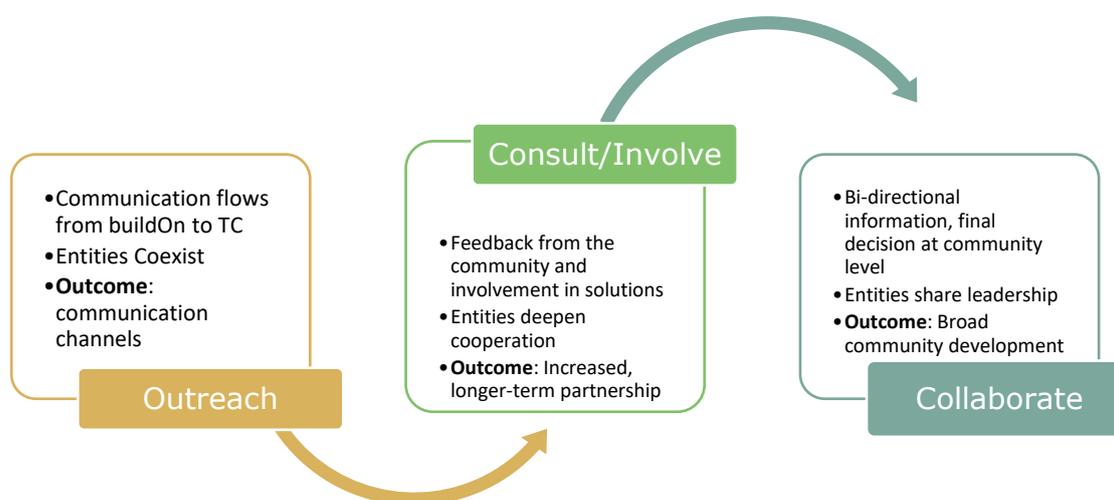
5.4. Invest in better planning.

To strengthen results-based programming and management and the planning tools currently in use, we recommend that buildOn develop robust planning instruments along the following lines. At the *global program* level, buildOn should develop a results matrix, based on the program intervention logic; and accompany this with the M&E matrix (see Recommendation 5); together, the ToC, results matrix and M&E matrix would comprise a buildOn Results Framework. At *country level*, we recommend development of:

a. An operational implementation plan. This should include a change management matrix, which can be used at both the program or project levels, to help managers identify indicator targets that are at risk, discuss and propose changes to bring the project/program back on track, and document justification for the changes made.

b. A risk management plan, including a risk analysis matrix. This is a useful tool for: identifying the external and internal negative events which can potentially alter the achievement of desired results; ranking them according to their likelihood of happening (low, medium or high); and defining a mitigation strategy for each medium-to-high risk. During this evaluation we put together a retrospective risk analysis for the school construction component in Nepal, which is indicative of the usefulness of such a planning and program management tool (**Annex 11**)

Country-level planning templates - provided by the Home Office, with support from Dubai Cares or other partners – should be used during the preparatory phase of the project.

At *community* level, we recommend greater resource investment in participatory planning, as we discuss in Recommendations 10 and 15.

5.5. Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

We strongly recommend that a global M&E plan be put in place, that can be used flexibly at country level as part of project design and certainly before beginning any monitoring activities. It will enable program/project staff decide how they are going to collect, analyze, report and disseminate findings and **use** them. M&E data alone is not useful until someone puts it to use! Indicative steps are:

Step 1 (linked to the ToC): Defining program results starts by answering three questions: What problem is the program/project trying to solve?; What steps are being taken to solve that problem?; How will program/project staff know when the program has been successful in solving the problem? Answering these questions will help identify what the program/project is expected to do, and how staff will know whether or not it worked.

Step 2: Defining Indicators, including *outcome indicators*/ Key Performance Indicators to track how successful program activities have been at achieving planned results; and *process indicators* track the progress of the project and help to answer the question, "Are activities being implemented as planned?". It is important to ensure coherence across process and performance indicators, rationalizing the three sets in **Annex 12.** As far as possible, the buildOn indicators at country level should link to/integrate sector monitoring indicators and annual EMIS data.

While KPIs should be shared across all projects, process indicators may need to be more flexible, in line with projects' country contexts. Indicators for the ALP need special attention, particularly in terms of assessment of participants' learning outcomes and changes made to the community measured by outputs.

Step 3: Defining methods for gathering data (the sources of data) and **how often** various data will be recorded to track indicators.

Step 4: Identifying who is responsible for collecting and managing the data for each indicator. As mentioned below, the Country Offices visited as part of the evaluation highlighted their need for additional M&E staff.

Step 5: Creating an M&E Matrix. A sample Monitoring Matrix (for process indicators and/or KPIs) is as follows:

Intervention logic Outcomes/Outputs	Indicator	Method	Frequency	Responsible	Baseline	Target by Year	Achievement against Target

Step 6: Collecting Baseline Data. This is essential and must be accomplished before monitoring begins.

5.6. Mutual accountability mechanism.

Accountability to donors is essential. However, the program could engage more with the learning dimension of accountability: knowing what to do when lines of responsibility are broken and something is going wrong, and taking action to right that wrong. We recommend several ways for buildOn to do this**:**

i. Place less emphasis on the Covenant as an accountability mechanism and improve *two-way* accountability through community-based monitoring, using simple methods and tools. A wide range of community monitoring methodologies are available; we recommend using a Community Score Card as a tool to respond to specific challenges that arise during project implementation and to ensure targeted communities feel they have a 'voice' in project management.

ii. Make the project budget and buildOn's contribution to school construction more transparent at the beginning (during participatory project design) and end of the project cycle.

iii. Institutionalize quarterly or semi-annual meetings between the communities, buildOn and local government authorities; for example, buildOn outputs could be included as a standing agenda item during existing decentralized education planning and management meetings and/or other community-based dialogue structures.

Finally, the buildOn Home Office is strongly advised further devolve decision-making power to the Country Office staff, reflecting, in consultation with country-level managers, on (a) which types of decisions are best taken on the ground; and (b) what quality assurance/supervisory measures can be put in place, to ensure country-level decisions are appropriate and adequate. The recommended change management plan is an important tool in this regard.

5.7. Rethink the scope of ALP.

To enhance the relevance of the ALP, we recommend a rethinking of the concept and scope of 'adult literacy', moving beyond learning the basics in terms of the '3Rs'. Understanding literacy as social practices helps development practitioners realize that rather than there being just one literacy, there are in fact multiple literacies operating within different contexts. Indeed, the Education 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) conceptualizes an adult learning trajectory, encompassing five dimensions of lifelong learning:

- Learning for foundational knowledge – Literacy development, awareness, enhanced proficiency;
- Learning for earning and productivity – Skill development, performance improvement, progression to technical career, income generation;
- Learning for recognized qualifications and educational progression – Second chance education with equivalency programs at par with formal education;
- Education for self-fulfillment – Need-responsive learning available to all learners;
- Education for social engagement – Leadership, decision making, communication, assertiveness, advocacy.

We recommend undertaking a rapid appraisal of the adult learning environment in targeted communities. The appraisal should accommodate the above five dimensions, or at least some of them, depending on the extent of buildOn's revisioning of 'adult literacy'. A rapid appraisal should include:

a) A pre-/post participation literacy assessment test, in line with national assessment protocols and benchmarks (if these exist), launching simple process for continuous assessment of learning outcomes;
b) A needs assessment for livelihood skills development/vocational training, taking account specific environmental factors; and
c) An equitable focus on the needs and aspirations of men as well as women in the community.

Such a rapid appraisal may be included as part of the Situation Analysis/Baseline Study, suggested above. However, it could also be undertaken by interested TREK volunteers, with support from buildOn staff and ALP facilitators. We note that while the participation of TREK volunteers in construction has proven to be inspirational, and the TREK component is a highly successful means of raising funds, the potential exists for volunteers to engage more in the ALP as 'a platform for community development'.

5.8. Rethink community contributions.

We strongly recommend also revisiting the notion of community contribution. We note that in-kind contributions from target communities do indeed create ownership, but in some cases these are in fact in-cash contributions, where local materials and local labour need to be procured, and this puts a burden on households that are living in poverty. Given this, we advise three related measures:

(1) in the short term, continue allocating a buildOn contingencies budget for local material procurement, to be used *in extremis*, to avoid delays in school construction;

(2) in the medium term, as mentioned above, the Covenant-driven community engagement process should enable communities to define their in-kind contributions and reflect on their ability to procure local materials/labour, if these are not available;

(3) in the longer term, drop the provision of local materials as a Covenant commitment and instead ensure that buildOn school construction is included in decentralized education plans (see Recommendation 5.15), so that adequate resources may be allocated/disbursed by local government authorities, and/or costs are shared between local government and buildOn.

5.9. Make School Construction more responsive to communities' needs.

The evaluation findings and lessons learned show that school building is a context specific process. We recommend that the site selection process start with a list of school building/classroom/latrine shortages provided by government. (These shortages are standard data collected by most, if not all, annual school censuses, and should be available from the EMIS management. Other useful standard EMIS indicators are GER, NER, GPI PCR, PTR, PQTR P-latrine ratio, dropout and completion rates, etc.) This list should be then measured against the buildOn site selection criteria. However, rather than using fixed selection criteria, we suggest that the criteria is as a program framework, allowing Country Offices to make context-specific amendments.

Final decision-making on site selection should be the responsibilities of communities working with local government, with support from buildOn.

We also strongly recommend that the buildOn enhances its 'state-of-the-art' construction reputation by introducing a degree of flexibility into the buildOn School model. Some examples of how this may be done, drawn from our discussions in Malawi and Nepal, are outlined below:

- Provide context-specific school-designs to suit site conditions and community requirements (e.g. multi-storey school buildings where land is limited, secondary school building, teachers housing needs, etc.)

- Introduce a more flexible construction time-line, taking into account the results of the country-level risk analysis.

- Share detailed and complete drawing plans with the target communities; and permit communities and local government to update and improve the buildOn school, post-construction.

- Provide a complete package of classrooms, furniture, water and sanitation; and ensure the schools are child-friendly, for both girl-children and children with disabilities.

- Take advantage of economies of scale by building several schools/blocks at once and procuring materials in larger quantities at a lower prices.

- Introduce a standardized, competitive procurement process. Best practices/options include: opening a request for quotation in local newspapers and clustering schools in one or two lots; or establishing unit costs (for some 4-6 months duration) in agreement with local venders selected through a competitive process.

- Deploy sufficient numbers of Field Coordinators, matching manpower to required field-visit coverage; and keep site books and use standard construction monitoring tools (see **Annex 11** for a recommended reporting template).

- Ensure basic construction quality assurance by, for example, conducting slump tests to ensure water-cement ratio of the mix; allowing sufficient time for curing which depends on weather, frequency and amount of watering and the method of curing; provide training in the use of concrete mixing machine and vibrator (rather than mixing by hand); using better quality (emulsion) paint; using (in Malawi) cement-sand blocks and Soil Stabilized Blocks (SSB) instead of environmentally unfriendly burnt bricks and breeze blocks, which block light.

5.10. Strengthen the effectiveness of ALP.

We recommend that buildOn engages more with community members and adult learners to take into account context specific challenges (e.g. standardized facilitators' honoraria, learning materials/textbooks, environmental factors likely to impede income-generating activities, etc.) and community-based adult learning needs. This may be done by including – as part of ALP implementation – micro-planning activities which are informed by the above mentioned rapid appraisal of the adult learning environment; or strengthening these in countries where they are already implemented. A wide range of participatory planning tools are available online (just one example is Action Aid's REFLECT Toolkit, including: the action plan tree**;** Seeds analysis**;** Growing seeds for change; Crossing the river; Impact diagram of an action plan/project; and 'Before' and 'now' maps – Action Aid, 2009). We also recommend conducting separate classes and learning activities for men and women.

If the ALP is expected to trigger wider community development, we strongly advise increasing the budget for ALP. This should be based on a realistic assessment of the resource requirements required for: pre-

planning/planning; adult literacy classes; textbooks and other learning materials; facilitators' remuneration; start-up income-generation activities; and monthly monitoring – including the assessment of Village Initiatives.

In this context, we note that participatory community-based micro-planning requires additional resources. We recommend, therefore, that if the ALP budget cannot be increased, then buildOn Country Office staff should focus on school construction and partner with other NGOs who are engaged in adult education and sustainable community development for the ALP component.

5.11. Improve reporting.

We strongly recommend a shift of focus from reporting-for-accountability to greater emphasis on the learning dimension of continuous monitoring and formative evaluation.

The Draft of buildOn Global Outcome Indicators is a move in the right direction, but these outcome indicators require careful definition and significant resource investment will be required to measure them. It may be useful to improve existing reporting templates, and detailing two types of reporting for:

a) internal monitoring/progress reporting where data are used to inform staff and stakeholders about the success and progress of the program; and to help staff make modifications and course corrections, as necessary; and
b) reporting to stakeholders/donors; where data are used to inform stakeholders and donors about the overall performance/impact of the program; and to make program practices more effective.

The M&E plan should include strategies for timely, more systematized, communication between buildOn and its development partners; and strategies for internal dissemination among the program team, as well as wider dissemination among stakeholders and donors.

5.12. Address capacity gaps.

We recommend addressing a number of technical capacity gaps. At country level, at the end of every three-year project cycle, it may be a good idea to conduct rapid needs assessments of departmental/staff members' individual capacities, to identify gaps. There is a pressing and urgent need to recruit M&E officers at country-level. Some indicative examples of other types of training from Malawi and Nepal include:

- Training of Trainers (ToT) in planning and managing the ALP and community-based income-generation; basic/advanced participatory learning assessment (PLA); and multi-grade/multi-age teaching;
- In-service construction training for Field Coordinators;
- Training for longer-term income-generation/Village Initiatives, linked to available vocation education and training (VET) providers;
- Training in participatory planning/community engagement
- Report writing and story-telling/writing.

In addition, it may be a good idea to reassess the Country Office staff-salary structures, to ensure these comply with national standards.

Where resources are not immediately available for mid-cycle training activities, partnerships with other local and international NGOs donors would leverage additional or complementary financial and human resources, filling short-/medium-term capacity gaps where these exist (see Recommendation 13).

A resource-efficient way for institutional capacity support is the one-off investment of providing Country Offices with How-To Guides or a Tool-kit; this may be utilized as an e-training package. The capacity development package may be developed by buildOn, with support from Dubai Cares and/or other donors; or a Tool-kit may be developed by Dubai Cares for use by all its global program partners.

5.13. Mobilize partnerships at country level.

Given that buildOn is a trusted organization, partnerships with communities could be deepened through alliances with other NGOs. We recommend conducting country-level stakeholder meetings including community representatives, local government partners, buildOn and other local and international NGOs at the close (and ideally also at the beginning) of a project cycle in order to:

- Share good practice (e.g. the Covenant) and identify innovative activities initiated by targeted communities, and ways to take these forward through support from local government and/or other NGOs;
- Identify potential partners to address technical capacity gaps and link with partners working in the areas of adult post-basic literacy and livelihood skills development, to take forward the learning gains of ALP participants;
- Link with partners at country level working to address challenges in context specific areas (such as food security in Malawi and seasonal migration in Nepal).

5.14. Anticipate and initiate Phase 2 of the project cycle.

We recommend building on existing target communities' increased demand for development. This may be done by engaging, at the end of a project-cycle, in post-project community mobilization. 'Community mobilization Phase 2' could include the following measures, as required or requested by the targeted communities:

i. Post-construction guidance and support on how school communities can engage further with local government authorities to ensure action is taken to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the schools (e.g. recruitment, deployment and payment of qualified teachers, or temporary/contract teachers where there is a shortage of qualified teachers; teachers' housing, provision of desks/benches; provision of textbook, etc.).

i. Capacity building for the SMC/PTA in (a) the function and responsibilities of local government authorities and the services they provide in relation to the communities; (b) school-based collaborative planning with local government authorities; (c) school maintenance and enhancement; and (c) community resource mobilization.

ii. Post-literacy needs assessments at community level, enabling ALP 'graduates' to move on to further literacy levels; and to other dimensions of 'lifelong learning'.

5.15. A stronger exit strategy.

The 'handover' of responsibility for a school building to the community in the form of a written document is gesture that is well appreciated by target communities. But there is no guarantee that this assumed responsibility will last, other than the sense of ownership generated by community contributions, which is not necessarily a longer-term guarantee. This is evidenced by the current state of disrepair of schools previously built by communities on their own initiative, which we observed in Nepal, for example. We strongly recommend a more carefully considered and constructed exit strategy. Three sensible suggestions, made by evaluation users in the field, are:

i. Establish, from the *outset* of the project, of a well-articulated and documented 'tripartite' agreement between communities, buildOn and local government that is grounded in national governance structures, enabling the transition into a stronger partnership between the targeted communities and local government authorities, once buildOn's support to communities has ended.

ii. Integrate, during the project design stage, buildOn outputs into existing decentralized education plans; this should be a provision of the 'tripartite' partnership mentioned above.

iii. Strengthen school ownership through the mandatory establishment of an operation and management (O&M) fund; ideally, this should be set up at the beginning of the construction process, but it should certainly be in place before the buildOn project closes.

A final reflection: tension or transition?

The evaluation results reveal a shared challenge for both buildOn and Dubai Cares: there appears to be an unresolved tension between the drive for global expansion, requiring a standardized model which can be used across countries *versus* intensified investment in community development, which is inherently heterogeneous.

This tension may be resolved through evaluation users' reflection on how overall programs can be refined. For example:

- buildOn Global, may reinforce its founder's strong legacy by introducing *more flexibility* into the overall buildOn methodology, thereby making a transition – from a relatively fixed and, by extension, simple community development methodology – to an approach that is more elastic and accommodating of specific requirements. Such a transition from a trademark to a *scalable* model would enable a greater contribution to sustainable education development, at both national as well as sub-national levels, in the countries in which buildOn works.

- Dubai Cares' mandate is understandably broad given its global coverage and mission to work across education sub-sectors in countries where the needs are greatest. This mandate also prioritizes a strong focus on local solutions to local problems. To sharpen its global mandate, Dubai Cares may explore the development of country-level strategies. These would (a) focus on responsive solutions in priority areas; (b) create linkages and coherence between buildOn projects and other related interventions supported by Dubai Cares; and (c) help Dubai Cares transition to a leading international development agency – as it intends to, according to interviewed staff – nurturing the next Emirati generation of development practitioners.

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