ILMpact

Strengthening learning systems through evidence and reflection

Learning from Implementers:

Report on the After Action Review of the ILMpact Programme

Submitted by

Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

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Executive Summary

The After Action Review AAR of the ILMpact programme was conducted as a structured learning exercise to reflect on implementation experiences, assess how well planned strategies matched field realities, and generate practical insights for future programmes. The exercise involved programme management, technical partners, and downstream partners across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. Overall, the programme showed good progress in community mobilization, teacher capacity building, and delivery of foundational learning activities, especially in early childhood education and remedial learning. However, performance varied across different areas, particularly in enrollment and mainstreaming under the Catch Up Programme, mainly due to broader systemic challenges rather than partner performance. At the beneficiary level, factors such as socio economic conditions, documentation requirements, and differences in student age and learning levels affected retention and mainstreaming, highlighting the need for more flexible and context specific approaches.

At the implementation level, partners faced several operational challenges including limited availability of teachers, reluctance to enroll overage or low performing students, delays in receiving learning materials, and heavy workload on field teams. Data related issues, such as complex monitoring systems and the burden of data entry on teachers, also affected efficiency and reporting quality. Despite these challenges, partners showed strong adaptability by adjusting plans, strengthening community engagement, and maintaining coordination with stakeholders. However, the repeated nature of these issues suggests they are systemic and require programme level improvements. Key lessons from the AAR include the need for flexible programme design, timely planning, better coordination among partners, and stronger alignment with school systems. Going forward, the programme should focus on simplifying processes, improving institutional integration, and strengthening data systems to ensure effective implementation across different contexts.

1. Background and Purpose of AAR

1.1. Programme Overview

ILMpact (Girls and Out-of-School Children: Action for Learning) is a multi-partner programme aimed at improving access to education and foundational learning outcomes for out-of-school and marginalized children, with a particular focus on girls. The programme operates through a consortium model involving technical partners and DSPs, and is implemented across multiple districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

The programme includes several key components, including:

- Catch-Up Programme (CLP) for out-of-school children to support transition into formal schooling
- Remedial Learning (RL) to improve foundational literacy and numeracy
- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to strengthen early learning outcomes
- Community engagement and safeguarding interventions, including strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Councils (PTCs)

Implementation is supported through teacher training, provision of learning materials, community mobilization, and digital monitoring systems. The programme is aligned with national and provincial education priorities, particularly in relation to improving foundational learning and promoting inclusive education.

1.2. Purpose of the After Action Review (AAR)

The After-Action Review (AAR) was conducted as a structured qualitative learning exercise to assess programme implementation and inform future planning. The primary purpose of the AAR is to:

- Reflect on the alignment between planned strategies and actual implementation
- Identify key challenges, bottlenecks, and enabling factors affecting programme performance
- Understand context-specific variations in implementation across districts and partners
- Capture adaptive strategies and lessons learned during the implementation cycle
- Generate actionable insights and recommendations to strengthen future programme design and delivery

The AAR provides a platform for programme stakeholders—including management, technical partners, and DSPs to systematically examine what worked, what did not, and why. By converting implementation experiences into structured learning, the AAR contributes to adaptive management, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous programme improvement.

2. Methodology

2.1. AAR Approach and Data Collection

The AAR was conducted as a structured qualitative reflection exercise, designed to systematically capture implementation experiences and generate actionable learning. The approach was guided by standard AAR principles, focusing on comparing planned strategies with actual implementation, and identifying what worked, what did not, and why.

The exercise was anchored around key reflective questions, including:

- What was planned and intended?
- What actually happened during implementation?
- What factors contributed to success or underperformance?
- What adaptations were made during implementation?
- What should be done differently in the next programme cycle?

To ensure comprehensive analysis, the AAR was structured across three stages:

- **Stage 1:** Contextual and Planning Phase
- **Stage 2:** Implementation Phase

- **Stage 3:** Future Planning and Strategic Direction

Data was collected through facilitated AAR discussions with key programme stakeholders at multiple levels, including:

- Programme Management (British Council)
- Technical Partners
- DSPs at provincial and district levels

Participants included project managers, MEL staff, and district coordinators, ensuring that both strategic and field-level perspectives were captured. Responses were documented using structured AAR tools and recorded in matrix format to support systematic analysis.

The AAR incorporated perspectives from DSPs across:

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PRDS, SRSP, FWA, PMS, ITA)
- Punjab (NRSP, Mojaz Foundation, Muslim Hands, ITA)

This multi-stakeholder engagement enabled the capture of diverse implementation experiences, contextual variations, and operational realities across provinces.

3. Stage 1: Contextual and Planning Phase Analysis

3.1. Planning Context

3.1.1. Policy and Programme Alignment

The ILMpact programme was designed in alignment with national and provincial education priorities, particularly focusing on improving foundational learning outcomes and expanding access for out-of-school and marginalized children. Core programme components including Catch-Up Programme (CLP), Remedial Learning (RL), and ECCE were structured to address both access and learning quality gaps. The programme's alignment with broader education sector reforms and SDG 4 objectives provided a strong policy foundation and facilitated engagement with government stakeholders.

3.1.2. Institutional and Implementation Arrangements

The programme adopted a consortium-based implementation model, involving technical partners and DSPs across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. This structure enabled leveraging of technical expertise, local presence, and community networks. However, the multi-layered implementation architecture also introduced complexity in coordination, communication, and role clarity across different actors.

3.1.3. Resource Environment and Planning Assumptions

Planning was supported by the availability of training materials, technical expertise, and institutional partnerships. However, it was characterized by ambitious targets, standardized design assumptions, and reliance on secondary data, which did not consistently reflect district-level variations. Budget constraints and adjustments during early phases further influenced planning decisions. As a result, while the programme was strategically aligned with policy priorities, operational readiness and contextual calibration remained limited at the outset.

3.2. Key Findings – Technical Partner Perspective

3.2.1. Design Complexity and Programme Ambition

Technical partners highlighted that the programme design was highly ambitious, aiming to implement multiple interventions simultaneously across diverse contexts. This created challenges in ensuring consistency in understanding and execution across partners, particularly given variations in capacity and context.

3.2.2. Evolving Scope and Budgetary Constraints

The planning phase was affected by budget reductions and evolving programme scope, which required mid-course redesign of activities and targets. These adjustments impacted planning stability and required partners to revise implementation strategies under constrained timelines.

3.2.3. Approval Processes and Implementation Readiness

Delays in government approvals, school selection, and security clearances affected timely initiation of activities. These delays had a cascading effect on planning, limiting the ability of partners to align resources and finalize operational plans of implementation.

3.2.4. Gaps in Shared Understanding and Operational Guidance

A key issue identified was the limited shared understanding of programme modalities across different levels**,** including interpretation of targets, intervention models, and sequencing. The absence of clearly defined SOPs and standardized operational guidelines at the outset contributed to ambiguity in planning and inconsistencies in execution.

3.3. Key Findings – Province-wise DSP Insights

3.3.1. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PRDS, SRSP, FWA, PMS)

3.3.1.1. Administrative and Approval-Related Disruptions

Planning in KP was significantly affected by delays in obtaining NOCs and subsequent changes in selected districts, which created instability in early programme design. DSPs

reported that initial planning particularly HR recruitment, field deployment strategies, and logistical arrangements, was often undertaken based on districts that were later revised. This resulted in duplication of effort, inefficient resource utilization, and delays in operational readiness. The repeated need to realign planning assumptions limited the ability of DSPs to establish continuity and momentum during the inception phase.

3.3.1.2. Impact of Geographic and Seasonal Variations

DSPs highlighted that planning assumptions did not adequately account for intra-provincial diversity, particularly the distinction between winter and summer zones. In districts with differing academic calendars and climatic conditions, uniform timelines for training, assessments, and enrolment activities proved impractical. This resulted in compressed or disrupted implementation windows, requiring reactive adjustments at later stages. The absence of season-sensitive planning reduced the feasibility of timely and synchronized rollout across districts.

3.3.1.3. Feasibility of Target Setting and Programme Scope

Targets related to CLP enrolment, coverage, and outreach were widely perceived as overly ambitious relative to contextual realities, including geographic spread, population density, and socio-economic conditions. DSPs noted that uniform targets did not reflect variations in accessibility, school availability, or community dynamics. This created planning pressure and unrealistic expectations, limiting the ability to develop grounded implementation strategies and affecting the credibility of initial planning projections.

3.3.1.4. Coordination Challenges within Consortium Structure

DSPs in KP reported that coordination gaps within the consortium affected clarity during the planning phase. Ambiguities in roles, sequencing of activities, and interdependencies among partners led to delays in decision-making and inconsistent planning approaches. In some instances, lack of synchronized communication resulted in overlapping responsibilities or delays in complementary activities (e.g., material distribution, training schedules). These coordination issues reduced planning efficiency and required DSPs to adopt ad hoc adjustments.

3.3.1.5. Human Resource and Operational Preparedness Constraints

Planning was further constrained by limited human resource capacity relative to the scale of intervention areas, with some DSPs managing large numbers of schools and districts with minimal staffing. This affected the ability to conduct detailed ground assessments, stakeholder consultations, and preparatory activities. As a result, planning depth was compromised, and reliance on assumptions increased, particularly in geographically dispersed or hard-to-reach areas.

3.3.2. Punjab (NRSP, Mojaz Foundation, Muslim Hands, ITA)

3.3.2.1. Structural Constraints in OOSC Identification and Targeting

In Punjab, DSPs consistently reported that high existing enrollment levels in many intervention areas reduced the feasibility of identifying out-of-school children (OOSC). Planning assumptions that relied on generalized data did not fully capture these contextual realities, leading to overestimation of the target population for CLP interventions. This mismatch between projected and actual OOSC availability affected both planning credibility and subsequent target achievement.

3.3.2.2. Policy and Documentation Barriers to Enrollment

DSPs highlighted strict admission policies and documentation requirements, including the need for formal identification (e.g., B-forms), limited flexibility in enrolling marginalized children. These constraints were not sufficiently integrated into planning assumptions, resulting in gaps between intended inclusion objectives and operational feasibility. This was particularly significant for vulnerable populations, where lack of documentation acted as a structural barrier.

3.3.2.3. Misalignment with Academic Calendar and Implementation Timing

Planning in Punjab was further constrained by limited alignment with the academic calendar, with programme rollout occurring during active school periods or close to examination cycles. This reduced the available window for effective implementation and affected sequencing of key activities such as training, assessments, and enrolment drives. As a result, DSPs had to compress activities or adjust timelines during implementation, reducing planning effectiveness.

3.3.2.4. Limitations in School Selection Criteria and Data Reliability

DSPs reported that school selection criteria were often complex and not fully aligned with ground realities, particularly where criteria required specific characteristics (e.g., high enrollment schools) that limited flexibility. Additionally, reliance on outdated or generalized datasets for planning led to discrepancies between planned targets and actual field conditions. This resulted in misdirected planning efforts and challenges in identifying suitable intervention sites.

3.3.2.5. Ambiguity in Operational Guidelines and Planning Clarity

A recurring issue across DSPs in Punjab was the absence of clearly defined SOPs and structured implementation guidance during the planning phase. This created uncertainty regarding roles, processes, and sequencing of activities, leading to inconsistent interpretation of programme components. DSPs had to rely on iterative clarification and adjustments, which affected planning efficiency and delayed readiness for implementation.

4. Stage 2: Implementation Phase Analysis

4.1. Implementation Performance and Key Findings

4.1.1. Overall Implementation Progress and Component-Level Variation

Implementation across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab demonstrated moderate to strong progress in several programme components, particularly in teacher training, community mobilization, and ECCE enrollment. DSPs were able to establish programme presence at both school and community levels, supported by local engagement and institutional linkages. However, performance remained uneven across components, with CLP interventions facing comparatively greater challenges in enrollment, retention, and mainstreaming.

ECCE emerged as the strongest-performing component, largely driven by high community demand and acceptance of early childhood education. Remedial Learning (RL) showed encouraging classroom-level engagement, though its effectiveness varied depending on teacher capacity, material availability, and monitoring consistency. In contrast, CLP interventions were constrained by structural barriers such as limited availability of out-of-school children, age-related considerations affecting implementation in certain contexts, and policy restrictions, leading to lower-than-expected outcomes in some areas.

4.1.2. Influence of Planning Constraints on Implementation Outcomes

A strong causal relationship was observed between planning-stage limitations and implementation performance. Delays in programme rollout, unrealistic targets, and insufficient contextual alignment translated into compressed timelines, operational inefficiencies, and increased pressure on field teams. DSPs were required to initiate multiple activities simultaneously—such as training, enrollment, and assessments—within limited timeframes, reducing the depth and quality of implementation.

Furthermore, standardized planning assumptions that did not reflect district-level realities resulted in variations in implementation effectiveness across locations, with some areas demonstrating strong uptake while others struggled to meet targets. This highlights that implementation challenges were not solely operational but rooted in systemic design and planning gaps.

4.2. Enablers and Drivers of Implementation

4.2.1. Community Engagement and Local Mobilization

One of the most significant enablers across both provinces was strong community engagement, facilitated through local networks, community leaders, and SMCs/PTCs. DSPs leveraged these structures to identify eligible children, support enrollment, and

maintain participation. In many cases, community trust played a critical role in overcoming initial resistance and enabling programme entry.

4.2.2. Government Alignment and Institutional Support

Alignment with government priorities and active coordination with district education authorities supported implementation by facilitating access to schools, approvals, and administrative backing. Institutional engagement enhanced programme legitimacy and enabled smoother execution of activities, particularly in areas where DSPs maintained strong relationships with education departments.

4.2.3. Teacher Capacity Building and Classroom-Level Engagement

Training of teachers and facilitators contributed to improved delivery of foundational learning interventions, particularly in RL and ECCE. Where effectively implemented, these trainings enhanced classroom practices and student engagement. However, the impact of training was moderated by contextual factors such as workload and competing responsibilities.

4.2.4. Localized Implementation and Field Presence

Recruitment of local staff and facilitators strengthened programme responsiveness and operational efficiency. Local hiring enabled DSPs to navigate community dynamics more effectively and ensured continuous field presence, particularly in geographically dispersed or hard-to-reach areas.

4.3. Key Achievements and Drivers of Success

4.3.1. Community Engagement and Local Ownership

Community engagement emerged as a central driver of programme effectiveness across implementation areas. DSPs effectively mobilized local structures, including School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent-Teacher Councils (PTCs), and community leaders, to support outreach and enrollment. This engagement not only facilitated access to learners—particularly in ECCE and remedial learning streams—but also strengthened trust and acceptance of programme interventions. The active participation of communities contributed to improved retention and sustained engagement, especially in areas where initial awareness or acceptance was limited. These findings underscore the importance of localized engagement strategies in strengthening programme ownership and ensuring continuity of implementation.

4.3.2. Effective Delivery of Foundational Learning Interventions

The programme demonstrated strong delivery of foundational learning interventions, particularly under ECCE and RL components. Classroom observations and field reflections indicate increased student participation, improved engagement, and greater

use of structured teaching approaches. In RL settings, grouping learners based on learning levels and applying targeted instructional methods supported more inclusive and responsive classroom environments. ECCE interventions showed higher levels of acceptance and participation, reflecting alignment with community needs and early learning priorities. These outcomes highlight the effectiveness of programme components where design, training, and classroom practices were well aligned.

4.3.3. Progress in Catch-Up Learning Programme (CLP)

Despite variations in implementation across locations, the CLP demonstrated positive progress in expanding access to learning opportunities for out-of-school and previously excluded children. DSPs were able to establish learning spaces, mobilize communities, and enroll learners who were otherwise not part of the formal education system. The programme contributed to re-engaging children with structured learning environments, particularly in underserved areas, and created pathways for their potential transition into formal schooling. In several contexts, community outreach efforts and localized engagement strategies supported enrollment and participation, reflecting the programme's relevance in addressing access-related gaps. These achievements highlight the programme's role in broadening educational inclusion and providing foundational learning opportunities to marginalized groups.

4.3.4. Adaptive Implementation and Field-Level Responsiveness

DSPs demonstrated considerable adaptability in responding to operational and contextual challenges. Implementation approaches were adjusted to accommodate local conditions, including modifications in outreach strategies, scheduling, and delivery mechanisms. Continuous engagement with schools, communities, and programme stakeholders enabled DSPs to respond to emerging issues in a timely manner, ensuring continuity of programme delivery. This adaptive capacity reflects strong field-level ownership and operational flexibility, which were critical in sustaining implementation across diverse and often constrained environments.

4.3.5. Strengthened Institutional Linkages and School Engagement

Engagement with schools and education stakeholders contributed positively to programme implementation. DSPs established working relationships with school leadership and teachers, which facilitated access, coordination, and integration of programme activities within school environments. Where programme interventions aligned with school routines and priorities, implementation was more effective and consistent. Teacher participation in training and classroom activities supported the uptake of programme methodologies, particularly in ECCE and RL. These linkages indicate progress toward embedding programme approaches within existing institutional structures.

4.3.6. Strong Field Presence and Localized Operational Approaches

The programme benefited from a strong field presence and contextually grounded implementation approaches. DSPs deployed local staff with familiarity of community dynamics, which enabled more effective communication, trust-building, and problem-solving at the field level. Regular interaction with schools and communities supported consistent delivery and allowed for timely identification and resolution of operational challenges. This localized approach enhanced responsiveness and contributed to smoother implementation across varied contexts.

4.3.7. Increased Stakeholder Engagement and Programme Acceptance

Across implementation areas, the programme demonstrated increasing levels of engagement among key stakeholders, including teachers, school leadership, and community members. This was reflected in improved participation in programme activities, greater willingness to adopt intervention approaches, and sustained involvement over time. The combination of community mobilization, school engagement, and consistent field presence contributed to strengthening programme acceptance and credibility. These outcomes provide a strong foundation for further scaling and sustainability of interventions.

4.3.8. Synthesis of Key Success Factors

Overall, programme performance was strongest in contexts where community engagement, institutional alignment, adaptive implementation, and strong field presence were effectively combined. These factors not only supported improved participation and delivery but also enabled DSPs to manage challenges more effectively. The experience highlights that aligning programme design with local realities, while maintaining flexibility in implementation, is critical for achieving both effectiveness and sustainability in multi-partner programmes.

4.4. Systemic and Operational Challenges

4.4.1. Programme Design and Targeting Constraints

A key set of challenges during implementation related to programme design and targeting assumptions, particularly where standardized approaches did not fully align with diverse contextual realities. While the programme aimed to ensure consistency in delivery, factors such as ambitious targets, uniform intervention models, and age-related considerations in enrollment and transition pathways influenced implementation feasibility in certain contexts. These dynamics were particularly evident in CLP interventions, where identifying eligible learners and facilitating their transition into formal schooling required greater contextual flexibility. The experience suggests the importance of adopting more adaptive and context-sensitive targeting approaches, enabling programmes to better respond to variations in local conditions while maintaining overall programme objectives.

4.4.2. Operational and Logistical Limitations

DSPs faced multiple operational bottlenecks that affected implementation efficiency. These included:

- Delayed distribution of learning materials, limiting timely classroom utilization
- Overlapping trainings and activities, increasing pressure on teachers and schools
- Limited human resource capacity, especially in areas with wide geographic coverage
- Infrastructure and space constraints for conducting CLP sessions

These factors collectively reduced the quality and consistency of programme delivery.

4.4.3. Coordination and Consortium-Level Inefficiencies

Weak coordination mechanisms within the consortium structure affected implementation consistency. DSPs reported delays in communication, unclear division of responsibilities, and lack of synchronization in activity sequencing, particularly where inter-partner collaboration was required. These inefficiencies led to duplication of efforts and delays in key activities.

4.4.4. Teacher Workload and School System Constraints

Teachers played a central role in programme implementation; however, several school-level constraints influenced their level of engagement and participation. These included high workload due to multiple trainings and competing academic responsibilities, particularly during examination periods. In addition, integrating learners with varying learning levels and age profiles within existing classroom structures presented practical challenges in some contexts, particularly where alignment with formal grade expectations was required. Teachers also faced additional responsibilities related to data entry and reporting, which further increased their workload. These factors highlight the importance of aligning programme interventions with school routines and providing adequate support to teachers to ensure sustained engagement and effective implementation.

4.4.5. Data Management and Monitoring Challenges

Data-related challenges were consistently reported across DSPs. These included:

- Inconsistencies in MIS systems and incomplete student profiling
- Frequent changes in data collection formats
- High data entry burden on teachers, affecting data quality and timeliness
- Limited digital capacity among field staff

While some DSPs mitigated these issues by hiring dedicated data personnel, the challenges point to systemic inefficiencies in programme monitoring systems.

4.4.6. Beneficiary-Level and Socio-Economic Barriers

Implementation was further influenced by structural factors at the beneficiary level, including poverty, lack of documentation, and competing livelihood priorities, which affected participation and continuity of learning. In addition, differences in learner profiles, including variations in age and prior learning exposure, influenced the pace and feasibility of transition into formal schooling in certain contexts. Mobility of families and irregular attendance patterns also posed challenges for sustained engagement. These factors highlight the importance of integrating socio-economic considerations into programme design and adopting flexible approaches to support inclusion and retention.

4.5. Adaptive Responses and Mitigation Measures

Challenge Area	Adaptive Response / Mitigation Strategy	Analytical Insight
Compressed timelines and delayed rollout	Adjustment of activity schedules and sequencing to align with academic calendar and field realities	Demonstrates need for flexible implementation frameworks when planning assumptions do not hold
Low enrollment and retention in CLP	Intensified community mobilization and outreach through local leaders and SMCs/PTCs	Community engagement proved critical in overcoming access and participation barriers
Operational and logistical bottlenecks	Reallocation of resources and prioritization of key activities at field level	Field-level decision-making enabled continuity but indicates gaps in centralized planning
Coordination gaps within consortium	Increased communication and engagement with partners and district stakeholders	Reactive coordination improved alignment but highlights need for stronger pre-defined governance structures
Teacher workload and resistance	Flexible scheduling of activities and targeted engagement with school leadership	Teacher buy-in is essential; operational burden must be managed to sustain participation
Data management and reporting burden	Recruitment of enumerators and data entry personnel to support data processes	Offloading data responsibilities improved reporting but indicates over-complexity of systems
Limited field-level problem resolution mechanisms	Regular follow-ups, monitoring visits, and real-time troubleshooting by DSP teams	Continuous adaptive management became essential to sustain implementation momentum

4.6. Key Lessons Learned (Implementation Phase)

Key Lesson Area	Lesson Learned	Implication for Future Programming
Programme Design and Feasibility	Programme targets, timelines, and scope must be aligned with field realities, institutional capacity, and contextual constraints	Future designs should adopt flexible, context-specific targeting and realistic implementation timelines

System Integration and Ownership	Effective implementation depends on strong alignment with school systems, including teacher ownership and supportive institutional policies	Greater integration with education systems and incentivization of teachers is critical for sustainability
Operational Simplicity and Efficiency	Complex processes, particularly in data systems and reporting, reduce efficiency and affect data quality	Simplified tools, streamlined reporting, and user-friendly systems should be prioritized
Community Engagement as a Core Driver	Sustained community involvement significantly improves enrollment, retention, and programme acceptance	Community engagement strategies should be embedded as a central component of programme design
Adaptive Management Capacity	DSP ability to adapt to changing conditions was critical in sustaining implementation despite constraints	Future programmes should institutionalize adaptive management mechanisms and decentralized decision-making

5. Stage 3: Future Planning and Strategic Direction

5.1. Strengthening Programme Design and Contextualization

The AAR highlights that future programming under ILMpact must move towards a more context-responsive and operationally feasible design, building on both successes and constraints observed during implementation. A key insight across partners is that programme effectiveness is closely linked to how well design assumptions reflect ground realities. Uniform targets and standardized intervention models were not sufficient to address the diverse socio-economic, geographic, and institutional contexts across districts.

Moving forward, programme design should adopt flexible and differentiated approaches, particularly for CLP and RL interventions. Targeting strategies, delivery mechanisms, and expected outcomes must be tailored to local conditions, ensuring that interventions are both realistic and impactful. This shift will help reduce implementation gaps and improve alignment between programme intent and field-level execution.

5.1.1. Need for Context-Responsive Design

The AAR highlights that future programming under ILMpact must move towards a more context-responsive and operationally feasible design, building on both successes and constraints observed during implementation. A key insight across partners is that programme effectiveness is closely linked to how well design assumptions reflect ground realities. Uniform targets and standardized intervention models were not sufficient to address the diverse socio-economic, geographic, and institutional contexts across districts.

5.1.2. Differentiated Approaches for Programme Components

Moving forward, programme design should adopt flexible and differentiated approaches, particularly for CLP and RL interventions. Targeting strategies, delivery mechanisms, and expected outcomes must be tailored to local conditions, ensuring that interventions are both realistic and impactful. This shift will help reduce implementation gaps and improve alignment between programme intent and field-level execution.

5.2. Improving Planning, Readiness, and Timing

5.2.1. Ensuring Early Operational Readiness

A critical area for improvement is the timing and sequencing of programme rollout. Delays in approvals, district finalization, and resource mobilization significantly affected implementation timelines, resulting in compressed delivery periods and reduced effectiveness. Future programme cycles must ensure that all key prerequisites—such as NOCs, partner onboarding, human resource deployment, and material readiness—are completed prior to initiation.

5.2.2. Alignment with Academic Calendar and Seasonal Variations

Programme planning must be closely aligned with the academic calendar and seasonal variations, particularly in contexts where climatic conditions and school schedules differ. Integrating these factors into planning will enhance operational feasibility and ensure that interventions are implemented within optimal time windows, avoiding disruptions caused by examinations or climatic constraints.

5.3. Strengthening Coordination and Governance Mechanisms

5.3.1. Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

The AAR underscores the need to strengthen coordination and governance within the consortium model. While the multi-partner structure enabled broad coverage and technical diversity, gaps in role clarity and responsibility allocation led to inefficiencies during both planning and implementation. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are essential to ensure accountability and alignment.

5.3.2. Establishing Structured Communication and Coordination Systems

Future programming should establish structured communication mechanisms and coordination protocols across all partners. Strengthening governance structures will be critical in minimizing duplication, improving decision-making processes, and ensuring timely execution of interdependent activities.

5.4. Enhancing Integration with School Systems

5.4.1. Strengthening Teacher Engagement and Ownership

Integration with the school system and institutional structures emerged as a central determinant of programme success and sustainability. The effectiveness of interventions, particularly RL and CLP, were closely linked to teacher engagement and ownership. However, challenges related to workload and competing priorities limited teacher participation in some cases.

5.4.2. Institutional Alignment and Sustainability

Greater emphasis is needed on aligning programme interventions with existing policies, school routines, and institutional frameworks. Embedding activities within the education system, rather than operating as parallel initiatives, will enhance sustainability and reduce dependency on external support.

5.5. Simplifying Operational and Monitoring Systems

The AAR findings highlight that complex operational processes and data systems significantly affect implementation efficiency and data quality. Frequent changes in tools, heavy reliance on teachers for data entry, and lack of standardization created unnecessary burden on field teams. While DSPs adopted interim solutions, future programming must prioritize simplification, standardization, and usability of systems to enhance performance and reduce operational friction.

Area of Improvement	Key Recommendation	Strategic Insight
Data collection systems	Simplify tools and reduce number of data points	Overly complex tools reduced data accuracy and increased burden on teachers
Reporting processes	Standardize reporting formats and minimize frequent changes	Frequent revisions created confusion and inconsistencies across partners
Role allocation in data management	Reduce reliance on teachers; assign dedicated data personnel where needed	Teacher workload affected both implementation and data quality
System usability	Develop user-friendly and context-appropriate digital tools	Limited digital capacity at field level requires simplified interfaces
Data use and feedback	Strengthen real-time dashboards and feedback loops	Timely data use can support adaptive decision-making

5.6. Institutionalizing Community Engagement

Community engagement emerged as one of the strongest enablers of programme success. DSPs consistently reported that active involvement of communities, local leaders, and SMCs/PTCs improved enrollment, retention, and acceptance of interventions. However, these efforts were often partner-driven rather than systematically

embedded in programme design. Future programming should formalize and scale these approaches.

Area of Improvement	Key Recommendation	Strategic Insight
Community mobilization	Institutionalize structured community engagement strategies	Strong community trust directly influenced participation and retention
Role of SMCs/PTCs	Strengthening capacity and involvement of school-level committees	Local structures enhance accountability and ownership
Outreach strategies	Develop targeted approaches for marginalized and hard-to-reach groups	Generic approaches are insufficient for diverse socio-economic contexts
Sustainability	Integrate community engagement into programme design and monitoring	Sustained engagement ensures long-term programme impact

5.7. Addressing Inclusion and Structural Barriers

The AAR highlights the need for more deliberate strategies to address structural barriers to access and inclusion, particularly for marginalized children. Documentation requirements, socio-economic constraints, and mobility patterns were key factors influencing participation and retention. In addition, age-related considerations in enrollment and transition pathways influenced the feasibility of mainstreaming in certain contexts, particularly where alignment with formal schooling structures was required. Addressing these challenges will require a combination of policy-level engagement, flexible enrollment approaches, and targeted support mechanisms to ensure that programme interventions remain inclusive while aligned with existing education system frameworks.

Area of Improvement	Key Recommendation	Strategic Insight
Documentation barriers	Introducing flexible enrollment mechanisms and policy advocacy	Lack of documentation excluded vulnerable children from participation
Age-related constraints	Adjust age criteria for CLP and mainstreaming pathways	Strict age limits reduced feasibility of transition into formal schooling
Socio-economic challenges	Provide targeted support for vulnerable households	Poverty and livelihood priorities affected retention and attendance
Mobility and retention	Design strategies for mobile and transient populations	Migration patterns disrupted continuity of learning

5.8. Embedding Adaptive Management and Learning

While DSPs demonstrated strong adaptive capacity, the AAR indicates that adaptive management was largely reactive rather than institutionalized. Future programming

should embed structured mechanisms that enable continuous learning, real-time feedback, and proactive adjustments throughout the implementation cycle.

Area of Improvement	Key Recommendation	Strategic Insight
Monitoring systems	Establish real-time monitoring and feedback mechanisms	Early identification of issues enables timely corrective action
Learning processes	Integrate regular reflection and learning exercises (e.g., AARs)	Continuous learning strengthens programme effectiveness
Decision-making	Promote decentralized and field-level decision-making authority	Field teams are best positioned to respond to contextual challenges
Adaptation mechanisms	Build flexibility into programme design and implementation plans	Proactive adaptation reduces reliance on reactive problem-solving

6. Conclusion

The AAR of the ILMpact programme provides a comprehensive reflection on the interplay between programme design, contextual realities, and implementation performance. The findings demonstrate that while the programme achieved meaningful progress in advancing foundational learning and community engagement, its effectiveness was significantly shaped by systemic constraints emerging from planning assumptions, operational complexities, and institutional dynamics.

A key conclusion is that the gap between design and context remains a central determinant of implementation outcomes. Standardized approaches to targeting, timelines, and delivery did not fully accommodate the diversity of provincial and district-level realities, resulting in uneven performance across programme components. This was further compounded by delays in approvals, misalignment with academic calendars, and coordination challenges within the consortium model, all of which reduced implementation efficiency and compressed delivery timelines.

At the same time, the programme demonstrated strong potential through effective community mobilization, localized implementation approaches, and the adaptive capacity of downstream partners. These strengths played a critical role in sustaining programme delivery despite constraints and highlight important foundations upon which future programming can build.

The AAR also underscores that sustainable impact is closely linked to system integration and operational simplicity. Interventions that aligned more closely with school systems, teacher capacities, and community structures were more effective and better received. Conversely, complex data systems, heavy reporting requirements, and limited teacher ownership constrained both efficiency and long-term sustainability.

Moving forward, the programme must adopt a more flexible, context-driven, and system-oriented approach, ensuring that design is grounded in operational realities and

supported by strong coordination and governance mechanisms. Simplification of processes, strengthening of institutional alignment, and prioritization of inclusive strategies will be essential for enhancing both effectiveness and scalability.

In conclusion, the AAR highlights that ILMpact has established a solid foundation for improving learning outcomes and access to education. By incorporating the lessons identified—particularly around contextualization, early readiness, coordination, and adaptive management, future programme cycles can achieve greater coherence, efficiency, and sustained impact across diverse implementation settings.