



FY 15 McGovern Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (ALIGN CAMEROON)

Interim Evaluation

February - March, 2017

Marydean Purves, Principal Investigator

Peter Shillie, Research Assistant



DISCLAIMER: This publication was produced at the request of the United States Department of Agriculture. It was prepared by an independent third-party evaluation firm. The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Agriculture or the United States Government.

Accessibility Note: An accessible version of this document can be made available by contacting fas.monitoring.evaluation@usda.gov

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5.
I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT	8.
A. The Project	
B. Beneficiaries and Target Groups	
C. Project Partners and Operations	
II. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION	9.
A. Objectives	
B. Evaluation Questions	
C. Audience	
III. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY	9.
A. Evolved Methodology	
B. Observations and Adjustments	
IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS	11.
A. “In which programming areas is implementation consistent with project work plans? Why?”	11.
B. In which programming areas do stakeholders anticipate that ALIGN’s programming is sustainable?	16.
C. Do stakeholders still view ALIGN’s results framework as relevant and valid?	18.
D. In which programming areas are ALIGN’s partnerships enhancing implementation? In which areas does the project need to strengthen partnerships?	19.
E. Does project data meet acceptable data quality standards?	21.
F. How much progress has ALIGN made toward its output indicator targets?	24.
G. To what extent is project implementation aligned with relevant national and local development policies and programs?	24.
V. OPERATIONS	24.
A. Management	
B. Staff Competencies & Satisfaction	
VI. DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSIONS	26.
VII. RECOMMENDATIONS	28.
A. Internal for management, short-term (now > 6 months/August 2017)	
B. Intensify operationalization and partner consolidation - (now > 18 months/Dec.2018)	

Annexes and Appendices

Acknowledgements

The team members of the Interim Process Evaluation for ALIGN would like to thank the staff of Nascent Solutions, Inc. for their unbiased support and availability during the evaluation. Our thanks also go to the various government officials and the personnel of peer organizations who shared their impressive knowledge and experience with complete candor. Finally, we express special thanks and admiration to the schools and Parent Teacher Associations we visited. Their hospitality and sincere enthusiasm as beneficiaries, participants and change agents in for the development of the education sector in Cameroon is unparalleled.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ALIGN	Advancing Literacy through Good Nutrition
CA	Cooperative Agreement
CBC	Cameroon Baptist Convention (school)
CODOC	Consortium of Development Organizations in Cameroon
DDS	Dietary Diversity Score
DPA	Department of Pedagogical Advisors
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FA	Field Agent
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FP	Fantastic Phonics
GS	Government School
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IPE	Interim Process Evaluation
IR	Intermediate Result
IST	In-Service Training
KII	Key Informant Interview
MBE	Ministry of Basic Education
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPH	Ministry of Public Health
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MGD/FFE	
/NCP	McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program
MINADER	Ministry of Agriculture and Development
MWRE	Ministry of Water Resources & Energy
NSI	Nascent Solutions, Inc.
N/SFP	National/School Feeding Policy/Program
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PS	Private School
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLO	School Liaison Officer
SO	Strategic Objective
SOW	Statement of Work
TTC	Teacher Training College
THR	Take Home Ration
TRC	Teacher Resource Center
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VIP	Ventilated Pit Latrine

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALIGN is a 3-year, \$12M project designed to improve the literacy of school-age children through improved literacy instruction, student attentiveness, and student attendance. Secondly, the project intends to improve the health and nutritional status of students through teaching principles of healthy diet and behavior and encouraging the community's participation and learning. The project runs from July 2015 to June 2018. An activity that is central to achieving the literacy goal is the provision of a daily school lunch and periodic take-home rations using food commodities provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The project benefits students and their families, teachers, administrators, civil servants, parent-teacher association (PTA) members, and others associated with 92 primary schools in Bui division, North West region, Cameroon. All 92 schools currently participate in each activity, with the exception of pilot projects involving e-readers and after-school tutoring.

The Interim Process Evaluation (IPE) provided the opportunity for Nascent, USDA, implementation partners, and stakeholders to reflect on internal processes, strategic direction, and implementation fidelity and quality. The results will aid Nascent to confirm or reassess the project's theory of change, redirect programming, improve data systems, and emphasize the most viable and effective partnerships and sustainability paths. It also contributed to decisions for timeline and potential budget adjustments.

The timeframe for the evaluation period was designated through the end of December 2016, which was the last available reporting period. Nonetheless, given the extraordinary conditions, once in country the IPE team determined that it could provide some useful observations about actions carried out in early 2017. IPE used participative, qualitative methods to obtain the required information, including key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGD). The assessment also employed some rating/scoring tools, training and observation checklists, and graphic illustrations to explore and present some trends.

The Nascent Solutions, Inc. project known as ALIGN is having transformational effect on the schools and communities in the catchment area, empowering teachers, parents, and students to become managers and masters of their learning environment. The true test of the project's relevance and influence will be these stakeholders' future commitment to their School Feeding Program, and by extension the educational programs. The scale of the operations, and the scope of the plans will challenge the staff and partners, but the dynamism of the PTAs and teachers is the most promising path into the institutional corridors where decisions are made, and change happens.

Conclusions

- *The IPE is satisfied that the theory of change is valid and that the process works* (e.g., literacy improvement through a school feeding program) even if the outcome to date is less than what could be expected. All discussions and inquiries suggest that stakeholders see a clear synergy between the project components, as the value and performance of the combined activities are producing greater effect than if they are stand-alone units. Nonetheless, there are lost opportunities to groom champions and spokespersons by not sharing more in-depth information on a regular basis with stakeholders.
- *Ownership at the school and community level is solid, but not enough* to take the program into the institutional framework. The parents and teachers are deeply invested. The Ministry of Basic Education (MBE) and the Ministry of Public Health (MPH) must see the cost/benefit, and how this project has solutions to the very problems they have in their portfolios. Ultimately, the models and

mechanisms promoted in this project must be embedded in formal institutions to have long lasting impact.

- The delays in implementation due to the current political crisis may erode gains in teacher performance achievements, and pupils will lose reading skills, noted elsewhere as ‘the summer slide’. The recently submitted Revised FY17 Work Plan acknowledges these concerns, and proposes some mitigation actions, such as a temporary mobile reading program. It will be essential that the project’s front line workers are well-oriented and prepared, so that there is minimal logistical confusion, and valuable reading materials are not lost or damaged.
- Front line workers (Field Agents) are dedicated and attentive, however greater field presence by program staff appears to be desired and necessary. Design and execution integrity risk being diluted. FAs also need the support and authoritative credibility from the technical experts.
- The risk of scope creep lies particularly with the gardens/farming activities, but it is also the arena with much potential for future NSI engagement. The communities see both the potential for expanded production and the challenges of addressing water shortages. Stakeholders must keep in mind that the end goal is a school feeding program, and the system for this should hold together wherever the food comes from. The role and scope of involvement by MINADER must be balanced to protect this construct. The Agriculture component currently has a number of actions and strategies that bear close observation and monitoring to serve as evidence and foundational elements for a possible associated program, rather than fully expanding within the parameters of the existing component.
- The e-technology components shouldn’t be under-estimated or under-used. While the e-reader pilot is a micro endeavor at this stage, it has tremendous potential to be the link to future scale-up programming and funding. It deserves more integrated programming attention, including use in the health and hygiene component, and especially a robust monitoring system to build the evidence base. Furthermore, the ICT trainings and the TRC should also be better integrated into the overall approach. eLearning will make teaching and learning easier and more efficient for teachers, not more complex, and as such it shouldn’t be treated as an extra-curricular activity for teachers.
- ALIGN is losing out on the current consultant arrangement with TTC facilitators. Under the terms of reference for the facilitators, there is no obligation to build linkages back to their TTC. Facilitators described the TTCs as ‘feeder institutions’ to schools, such is the potential to influence quality teacher training.
- Policy development cannot be left to consultants or mid-level program staff. The current plan as designed will not contribute to the required result MGD 1.4.2. Policy development activities require technical expertise and input, and lobbying and negotiation at the level of Country Director, or Project Manager at a minimum. The outcome accrues to the reputation of NSI – one way or another. Furthermore, outsourcing the activities to a consultant reduces the internal capacity-building and intellectual capital gains for ALIGN/NSI.
- The effect to which the program can have impact in the policy environment will depend on good use of good evidence. The project has the advantage of a national school feeding policy on the books. The government needs regular, valid documentation and evidence that it works. ALIGN is the only laboratory for testing the NSFP in real conditions. This, along with constant accountability reminders to government about the SDGs, the PRSP, and Vision 2035 should be part of the basic pillars for ALIGN’s strategy for MGD Result 1.4.2.

Recommendations

Technical/Program Sectors	Training	M & E	Logistics
February to August 2017			
Share key documentation with partners to reinforce their understanding of the project.	Pull together handouts to accompany all trainings as key takeaway products-including certificates of achievement (for PTAs as well)	Tighten data quality as per USAID assessment criteria.	Set up a 'P' drive on a central computer to house all key project documentation, and make it required reading for all staff to refresh their knowledge.
Take partners on field visits, even though schools are closed. They need to see the full package.	Refresher sessions for FAs	Education Sector: Finalize teacher supervision checklists and set up the database.	Review the budget to find additional funds for increased field visits by program/technical staff.
Thoroughly orient program staff on e-reader program and ICT training package – look for integration into their sector areas	Keep the TRC busy with training, research, etc. Make it clear to teachers the TRC is theirs.	Get e-reader monitoring and assessment tools into the system.	Require consultant engineer to tighten construction standards.
Finalize and operationalize the MPH MOU		M & E officer get program staff involved in data input review and verification.	Caritas share water works plans (including solar panels) with PTAs for future maintenance & repair needs.
Ensure ministerial 'seal of approval' on materials that go into schools.		Tighten the handwashing observation tools, and associate MPH.	CD plan visits for longer periods.
Caritas make overtures to the new Delegate at MWRE to build the alliance, and share results from the surveys.			
Revise the obligations of the TTC facilitators to include presentations, working groups, etc. to their peers inside their TTC.	Train all staff on use of e-readers and e-tablets.	Review capacity of FA tablets, and upload capacity-building tools.	ICT focal point locate more e-reader products and do massive download.
February 2017-December 2018			
Revise the Policy component, and begin campaign-style strategy.	Review training procedures for facilitation of cascade training.	Build off-line system for data management**.	Obtain French language books for libraries from French Embassy/Cultural Center.
Investigate the possibility/necessity of a monetization plan for commodities through the PTAs.*			Investigate the possibility/necessity of obtaining a waiver for expiration dates on commodities.
Prepare Cost Extension and/or No-cost Extension.	Consider PTA cross-visits.		Convert oil cans and commodities bags to usable assets for PTAs.
Senior management pursue network expansion and alliances with e-learning initiatives on the African continent.	Codify Fantastic Phonics Peer training within schools – trained teachers become 'Master Teachers'.		Caritas investigate the exploitation of extra solar energy for electrification at schools when water tanks are full.
Seek to expand the e-reader pilot program based on evidence collected.			
Institutionalize all training and guidance into respective formal Institutions.			
Develop follow-on project proposals for school farm cooperatives; mobile libraries, computer technologies in schools.			

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

A. The Project

ALIGN is a 3-year, \$12M project designed to improve the literacy of school-age children through improved literacy instruction, student attentiveness, and student attendance. Secondly, the project intends to improve the health and nutritional status of students through teaching principles of healthy diet and behavior and encouraging the community's participation and learning. The project runs from July 2015 to June 2018. An activity that is central to achieving the literacy goal is the provision of a daily school lunch and periodic take-home rations using food commodities provided by USDA. The ALIGN project seeks to improve:

- 1) Quality of literacy instruction, through more consistent teacher attendance, better materials, and training of teachers and administrators;
- 2) Student attentiveness, through extracurricular activities, and the aforementioned daily lunch program;
- 3) Student attendance, through school infrastructure improvements, enrollment outreaches, an increased community understanding of education benefits, and reducing health related absences;
- 4) Use of positive health and dietary practices, through increased knowledge of hygiene, safe food preparation, and nutrition, as well as increased access to clean water and sanitation, preventative health interventions, and safe food preparation and storage items.
- 5) The environment in which schools operate, through enhancing the capacity of local government and civil society, as well as local education- and nutrition-related policies and financing.

B. The Beneficiaries and Target Groups

The project benefits students and their families, teachers, administrators, civil servants, parent-teacher association (PTA) members, and others associated with 92 primary schools in Bui division, North West region, Cameroon. All 92 schools currently participate in each activity, with the exception of pilot projects involving e-readers and after-school tutoring. The targeted schools include government-run public schools, and private schools including those affiliated with the Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Islamic faiths. On average, the 92 schools have 226 students enrolled across grade levels 1-6. The average student to teacher ratio is 38:1. All 92 schools were part of the 2008-12 McGovern-Dole project led by Counterpart International with Nascent as award sub-recipient. In collaboration with local stakeholders the schools were selected from the applicants based on the following criteria:

- Lack of access to water and sanitation services;
- Inadequate school infrastructure;
- Lack of access to supplies and literacy materials;
- Lack of trained teachers;
- Low enrollment figures, especially for girls, particularly in the Mbororo/Fulani communities;
- Willingness of the school community to contribute materials, unskilled labor, and land for the school garden.

C. Project Partners and Operations

ALIGN partners with the Bui Division Basic Education Delegation, local authorities from the Ministries of Public Health, Agriculture, and Water and Energy, and Caritas Kumbo. International partners include Books for Africa, World Reader and Fantastic Phonics. ALIGN operates two project offices: Kumbo, the headquarters of Bui division, and in Yaounde the capital of Cameroon. 31 in-country staff, along with a number of consultants, are deployed across a geographical area divided into 10 zones.

II. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

A. Objectives

The Interim Process Evaluation (IPE) provided the opportunity for Nascent, USDA, implementation partners, and stakeholders to reflect on internal processes, strategic direction, and implementation fidelity and quality. The results will aid Nascent to confirm or reassess the project's theory of change, redirect programming, improve data systems, and emphasize the most viable and effective partnerships and sustainability paths. It also contributed to decisions for timeline and potential budget adjustments. The An interim evaluation differs from an impact evaluation as it focuses more on design suitability, implementation processes, and (in some cases) management approaches. Nevertheless, an interim evaluation can also examine the five principle factors that govern an impact evaluation as a means to orient the actions toward these factors. They include 1), effectiveness 2), sustainability 3), relevance 4), efficiency and 5), validity. For an overview on the associations between these factors and the current interim evaluation research questions, see [Annexes 1a.1b. Statement of Work and Key Question Matrix.](#)

B. Evaluation Questions (in order of priority)

1. In which programming areas is implementation consistent with project work plans? Why?
2. In which programming areas do stakeholders anticipate that ALIGN's programming is sustainable?
3. Do stakeholders still view ALIGN's results framework as relevant and valid?
4. In which programming areas are ALIGN's partnerships enhancing implementation? In which areas does the project need to strengthen partnerships?
5. Does project data meet acceptable data quality standards?
6. How much progress has ALIGN made toward its output indicator targets?
7. To what extent is project implementation aligned with relevant national and local development policies and programs?
8. What are key recommendations to address deficiencies hindering the achievement of outcomes?

C. Audience

The primary audience for the IPE is the donor, the United States McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (FFE/CNP), under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The FFE/CNP will consider the findings and recommendations of the IPE in deliberations on near term and long term programming.

The secondary audience for the IPE is Nascent, Inc. staff. Nascent management is expected to review the findings and recommendations, taking forward those points that are deemed to be valid and beneficial for program improvement.

Tertiary audiences include principal partners Caritas Kumbo, the Ministry of Basic Education, Ministries of Agriculture and Public Health, and the Bui Division Administrative units.

III. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The original Terms of Reference included a suggested alignment between the evaluation questions (I.B.) and methodology. This was the point of departure for the IPE approach, with some adjustments.

A. Evolved Methodology

The timeframe for the evaluation period was designated through the end of December 2016, which was the last available reporting period. Nonetheless, given the extraordinary conditions, once in country the IPE team determined that it could provide some useful observations about actions carried out in early 2017. IPE used participative, qualitative methods to obtain the required information, including key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGD). The assessment also employed some rating/scoring tools, training and observation checklists, and graphic illustrations to explore and present some trends. The table below describes the methodology, data source, data collection and analysis process, and limitations.

<i>Methodology</i>	<i>Data source</i>	<i>Data collection & analysis process</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Focus Group Discussions	1) PTAs 2) Teachers 3) ALIGN Staff	- Discussion guides - Selected informants of both genders - Groups limited to 10-15 persons - Audio recorded with permission - Response formats to identify frequencies and trends - Questionnaire (staff) collation and consolidation	- The strike action limited access to some teachers - Only one PTA declined to be recorded - Technical incompatibility between computers meant some audio recordings were inaccessible to the PI.
Key Informant Interviews	1) GoC Division personnel 2) Ministry of Basic Education 3) Ministry of Agriculture 4) Ministry of Public Health 5) ALIGN Staff 6) School Head Masters 7) ALIGN Consultants	- Discussion guides - Participant profile criteria - Audio recorded with permission - Note taking - Key word and concept grouping	- No major limitations
Training Verifications	1) PTA members 2) Teachers	- Checklist - Consolidation of checklist results	- No major limitations
Observation	1) Kitchen & Store Rooms 2) Latrine Blocks 3) Wash Stations 4) Tap stands	- Checklist with construction criteria - Consolidation of checklist results	- No major limitations
Document Review	ALIGN project documents	- Scanning and key concepts capture (see Annexes)	- No major limitations
Management /Operations Verification	1) US-based staff 2) Country Director 3) Admin/Finance Officers	- Checklist - Consolidation of checklist results	- Limited internet access

The final count for all inquiry activities is as follows. A log for all FGDs/IIIs is in the annexes.

- 17 Focus Group Discussions (1,020 minutes of audio recordings)
- 23 Key Informant Interviews (1,350 minutes of audio recordings)
- 25+ documents reviewed
- 20 Construction works observations
- 27 Checklist verifications (trainings, facilities, operations)

B. Observations and Adjustments

The evaluation questions spanned both the operations and the program arenas of the ALIGN project. Thus, some inquiries looked at management, including timely implementation, human resource capacity, and logistics as a means to assess the value of operational efficacy as it contributes to program performance.

Political and civil disturbances influenced the ability of the evaluation team to conduct field visits. This report acknowledges some revisions to the scope and authority of the evaluation due to these disruptions. Only eight schools were visited, thus findings cannot be considered inclusive or definitive.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The Findings are grouped by Key Question. Under that heading, information is organized by response group or type. The FGD and KII guides were designed to correspond with the key questions (I.B.), and a response format aided in recording the frequency and trends in responses (see annexes). Information to correspond with Key Questions was also built into the checklists/verifications, and where applicable by document review. All evaluation tools are found in the annexes, along with response formats. Audio recordings in MP3 format are archived at NSI.

H. “In which programming areas is implementation consistent with project work plans? Why?”

This Key Question seeks in part to establish if the program is on track with the timeline of implementation. Both USDA and Nascent are well aware of major delays and departures from the original (2015) work plans, all of which have been documented and accounted for in reports to USDA. The majority of these were independent of NSI’s operational capabilities, and should not constitute reason for penalty of any sort. For the record, incidences that resulted in delays to implementation included:

- Internal considerations within USDA which held up actual contracting by almost 12 months;
- First year commodities shipment setback;
- Civil unrest leading to disruptions in the school year;
- Interruption of internet services due to civil unrest, leading to decreased ability of offices to communicate with each other;
- Insecurity and political tensions leading to decreased ability to move about freely for the purposes of conducting activities.

The November/December 2016 report acknowledged the incomplete tasks:

“Planned activities for the months of November and December that were not achieved:

- *The replication of refresher trainings on health, hygiene and nutrition, safe food preparation and storage practices,*
- *Monitoring of hygiene and sanitation activities in kitchens,*
- *Initiation of promotional activities on health and hygiene in schools and communities, commodity management*
- *The training of the second and last group of PTAs on literacy and engagement in school [incomplete]*

- *The transportation of commodities to school stores, continuation of school feeding activities and distribution of take home rations*
- *DHIS2 training for project staff.*

The above activities were not completed due to the strike action”.

Readers should understand that not only are schools closed, but the ‘strike action’ involves the complete shut-down of non-governmental and private sector businesses for two consecutive business days at a time. Persons seen to be ‘violating’ the strike action have been subject to sabotage, violence, and public condemnation. Thus, even those activities in the above list which were not held in schools such as the trainings, had to be suspended, so as not to put anyone in physical jeopardy.

Desk review of earlier actions helped to gauge consistency. The IPE verified fulfillment and compliance on the expected major procurements and contributions listed in the USDA Cooperative Agreement (CA). All six major procurements have been completed among which 1), contracts for construction 2), purchase, shipment, and deployment of a well-drilling rig 3), cooking utensils and 4), garden tools and supplies. Major contributions from partners and sub-contractors have also been received including containers of books, donated land for gardens, donated labor and building materials. Collaborations for brokered services, technical assistance, and partnering are also on track for the most part. Please consult the annexes for a detailed verification of all major procurement and contributions required and fulfilled under the CA.

Other angles were pursued to address the question about consistency by examining program conceptual integrity. One fundamental element of a successful project is the cohesion between project design, and how this translates into logical implementation. Further evidence can be found in the familiarity of all stakeholders with the overall program, demonstrating an understanding of how the activities are inter-related and dependent upon each other to produce results. The degree to which these two conditions are evident is a direct manifestation of program staff’s own understanding and ability to roll out and maintain unity across the various components.

1. The School Feeding Program features most prominently among all ALIGN components with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA), followed by the books and library initiatives. The pace of program roll-out is satisfactory, although anticipation makes them impatient.

While focused primarily on the school feeding program, PTAs expressed a solid understanding and engagement in the associated elements necessary to produce the food plate every day, five days a week, for pupils. PTAs are leading the garden activities, the commodities inventories, and the cooking schedules. They are key contributors to the infrastructure initiatives (kitchens, store rooms, classrooms, latrine blocks, wash stations). Notably, they can intelligently describe the project’s theory of change, which links literacy to improved nutritional status, improved attendance, enhanced teaching skills, and health through hygiene.

“We can see the connections to learning- feeding contributes to attendance and attention in class”.

PTA member, GS Kiyari

“They [ALIGN] have a full program – feeding children, they have libraries to help children grow in reading, and also sanitation. And they help us to make farms and gardens for the continuity of the project”.

PTA member, GS Djottin

The recent distribution of books and library management training by CODOC may still be fresh in the memory of PTA members, thus prompting the frequent citing of books and libraries as the other major element of ALIGN. Notwithstanding, it may also be an indicator of the importance they give to the reading culture that is being promoted by ALIGN. As noted in the project core documents, many parents do not themselves read*, and thus live daily with the consequences of this. PTAs also described their role in community mobilization for enrollment and calls to participate in ALIGN actions as a regular task. Finally, those schools with an E-reader pilot activity made special note of the effect this program is having.

"I have learned from library management training how to catalog our new books. We are going to do a reference system also. We also have a reading room for children".

PTA member, GS Wvem

"We go to [baby] naming ceremonies to promote school enrollment for that child".

PTA member, PS Tatum (Muslim school)

"The e-readers and the feeding program makes us proud".

PTA member, PS Roberta

During the IPE, PTAs pointed out on the walking tours of their schools all of the tangible signs of the ALIGN project in progress – from new kitchens to latrine blocks, to books waiting to be catalogued, to the water works positioning stakes in the ground. For the most part, they were aware of the sequence of actions and subsequent initiatives due to be implemented in their particular school.

The least understood ALIGN activity across all PTA discussions (and teachers) was the Take Home Ration (THR) in association with girls' education. Generally, respondents felt that a THR should be given to all students – which exposes a lack of understanding about the purpose of the THR as linked to promotion of girls' education, and specifically their attendance. The most frequent observation was that boys need motivation to come to school also. During community mobilization campaigns for enrollment, some groups were citing the THR as motivation for all children. Others felt that teachers should also receive either a lunch or a take-home ration.

2. Teachers primarily identify ALIGN with reading deliverables – library, text books and pleasure books, and secondly, improved teaching skills.

Once again, spontaneous references to known ALIGN activities may have been influenced by the most recent actions over the last three months. However, teachers called special attention to the acquisition of textbooks ('readers') and the installation of the library in their schools. A number of respondents referred to the importance of reading for more than just 'sitting an exam', and acknowledged the welcome addition of pleasure books for use in the classroom as well as for after-school activities (reading clubs).

"Through ALIGN, our students are able to have textbooks, which helps in our teaching".

Teacher, PS Tatum

The library training was 'over-fine'; the time was too short for a long topic; we need a refresher course for library; I was really impressed with the trainers. I never had an idea before about libraries!"

Collected observations from trainees - checklist

* Cameroon has a relatively good adult literacy rate (75% - CIA Factbook) linked to a colonial history of desired schooling, however 'lapsed literacy' is a common phenomenon where adults cease to use reading skills acquired long ago.

Teachers did not first mention the teacher training series as an ALIGN activity, and had to be prompted to describe the In-Service Trainings (IST). Some of the teachers only benefitted from a ‘cascade training’ by fellow instructors, so it followed that it wasn’t fresh in their minds. Once on the topic, teachers were effusive about the Fantastic Phonics methodology, stating how applicable and effective it has been for them. Training on classroom management was also highly appreciated, as very relevant to their work.

“My colleagues watched me teach FP in order to learn. As for FP kids love it for the stories. I will train my colleagues using it in the classroom. I have introduced FP to grade 2. There has been one monitoring visit already, and I applied some recommendations on better use of FP”.

Collected observations from trainees - checklist

“The Fantastic Phonics program was a great help. With this, my school came in first in the Division, and 4th in the national scoring”.

Teacher, GS Yongkui

“Fantastic Phonics training has helped me a lot. I prepare my sound and word building materials easily and children are very interested in it, the children can read and write now better than before”.

Teacher, CS Djottin

Teachers spontaneously described other related ALIGN components, specifically the hygiene-related activities such as latrines, washing stations and handwashing. The familiarity with hygiene elements may also be due to the regular visits by personnel from the local health centers. As with the PTA, teachers were very clear on the linkages between learning, improved nutrition, and hygiene.

“When the stomach is full and they are now healthy then they can study”. Teacher, PS Roberta

“Kids get a balanced diet, which helps them to learn”.

Teacher, GS Djottin

“Enrollment is now stable due to feeding. Kids come to school on time – even early! Absenteeism is now reduced.”

Teacher, GS Djottin

“Additionally, this program has served as a forum to help improve communication between PTA and teachers”.

Teacher, PS Tatum

More than one teacher talked about the garden activities, in the context of a ‘teaching lab’. Teachers take students to work in the garden, and use the opportunity to teach about plants, as well as to do spelling and word recognition.

3. Infrastructure projects are largely compliant with construction specifications, with some delays in the calendar, and the occasional quality control issue (see annexes for verification checklists).

The oversight on kitchen/store room/latrine block/classroom construction is managed by a consultant engineer, who appears to have a solid grasp of the necessary specifications and execution standards. The designs are consistent with basic international standards, e.g., ventilated pit latrines, smoke drawing chimneys, air circulation in store rooms. The Ministry of Basic Education has standards for classroom construction but not for kitchens. Execution does vary slightly in quality, and among the facilities visited during the IPE, the VIP latrine construction suggests that the pipe/mesh technology and purpose is not fully understood by some contractors. At the time of the IPE, 2 companies were reportedly behind

schedule and given a 2-week window to finish, as well as to correct quality control issues that were signaled during inspection/handover activities.

Caritas (sub-contractor for water works) conducted quite thorough infrastructure surveys which informed decisions regarding the type of water system to install or renovate at each school site. The water storage tanks, tap stands, and handwashing stations are also rigorous in design and consistent with government standards, and perhaps surpassing them in quality of execution and innovation. Caritas is required by ALIGN contract to assure the maintenance and repair of the sites for 6 months, however the Ministry of Water Resources and Energy (MWRE) claims that all contractors of water facilities are obligated to do maintenance and repairs for 12 months. The survey has yet to be shared with the MWRE, which would benefit from the geological data they gathered. According to the ALIGN Work Plan, each school site receiving a water source should also receive 2 handwashing stations – one near the kitchens, and one at the site of the latrine blocks. IPE team only saw one station at each of the sites visited.

4. The E-reader pilot program and Teacher Resource Center (TRC) appear somewhat sidelined.

The IPE visited 2 schools with the e-reader pilot program. Anecdotal information reveals high enthusiasm and remarkable progress in reading skills among the pupils who are using the tablets. However, there is no mention of the program in October, November, December reports, despite references in the Sept.2016 report of the development of a study design to initiate monitoring activities, and the assertion by the Education Program officer of monitoring e-readers in 2 schools. The M & E officer and the ICT officer are not involved to date in a substantive way with the e-readers, which is a lost opportunity, given that one (M&E) could be setting up a progress tracking system, and the other (ICT) could be providing expertise on the mechanics of the technology as well as researching future new download products.



**Participants at the ICT training
Feb.15-16, 2017.**

The TRC only recently began operations, with a first training in November 2016¹. Independent of the logistical challenges due to the strike action, the potential of the TRC doesn't appear to figure centrally in the overall program design. In a number of PTA and Teacher FGDs, the importance of gaining ICT skills was mentioned frequently and ALIGN's target population is keenly aware of the need to obtain these skills. As evidence, one training occurred during the IPE, with high attendance despite the strike action. Nevertheless, there doesn't appear to be an operational plan to attract teachers to use the TRC during their off-hours. During the work week, the computer stations have become the work stations for field agents.

5. The straight line between girls' education and the Take Home Ration isn't well articulated by ALIGN staff.

¹ "The Teacher Resource Centre went operational in the month of November 2016. One cohort of teachers comprising 4 of 10 invited teachers from 03 project schools participated in the 2 days training on basic ICT skills including Microsoft word, excel, internet use, emailing. The low participation was as a result of the onset of the Teachers' strike". *ALIGN November-December Report 2016 – draft.*

The ALIGN staff has a sympathetic understanding of the importance of girls' education, acknowledging primarily the need to counter the practice of taking girls from school for farm labor. However, no one could clearly explain why girls of Class 5 and 6 receive the THR. This confusion filters back down to the PTA members and teachers, as evidenced in the FGD discussions.

"We try to make them understand that girl children are more caring than boy children to the families, and they always come back when they are educated to care for the family".

ALIGN staff member

"The girl child is used as a back-up for labor. We can't stop that because it is justified [], myself I don't understand the emphasis on class 5/6 girls. If I were to recommend, I would say it is good to motivate everybody to attend, irrespective of gender".

ALIGN staff member

6. Actions for *Improved policy and regulatory framework* have not made significant progress.

The last reference to any activity on these two MGD results was in the September 2016 semi-annual report. MGD 1.4.2:

"No new policies or procedures were pursued from April - September 2016, but work continued on the five which were being researched in October 2015 – March 2016: teacher attendance monitoring, student minimum age of entry, student promotion, general literacy curriculum, and home-grown school feeding".

The IPE could not trace 'the work on the five policies' as mentioned above. It should be noted that just prior to the IPE, the staff member responsible for the policy/governance component was released.

However, actions on MGD 1.4.3 *Increased Government Support*, have garnered some notable contributions:

"ALIGN encouraged and co-opted over US\$274,400 of support from the Cameroonian government, in the form of import duty exoneration on vegetable oil, over 117 acres of land donated for school garden, books from Books for Africa, food and condiments from PTAs, and seeds from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development".

The conceptual approach for policy work and plans for execution are not fully understood by ALIGN staff. The recent staff changes for oversight on MGD Result 1.4.2 may help resolve this issue. Currently the activities geared toward producing results are out-sourced to a consultant, who is supervised by the School Liaison Officer. The IPE provided some orientation that may help ALIGN re-invigorate this component (see annexes).

In summary, discussions, interviews, and formal reports provide evidence of compliance in executing the actions as described in Work Plans, with a few unfulfilled areas. Moreover, there is a broad consensus that the program design works well and suits the context and capacity of the schools and communities.

I. In which programming areas do stakeholders anticipate that ALIGN's programming is sustainable?

Across all discussions and interviews among the different stakeholders, there were consistent trends pointing to the sustainability of 1), the School Feeding Program, which included gardens and farms 2), the library initiative and 3), maintenance and functionality of the water and sanitation works.

1. PTAs were unanimous in confirming their ability to keep the School Feeding Program going without ALIGN intervention.

The gardens and farms are the nexus of the SFP for the PTA, where the products originate for the meals. The inputs from ALIGN which included improved seeds, garden tools, irrigation systems, and training have provided the foundation, and the PTAs manage the entire process, from planting to harvest to kitchen. Building on this, all PTAs have an organized food storage and preparation scheme, with food storage and stock inventory systems, rotation cooking schedules, and in some cases, supplemental food supply plans, and sales of surplus harvests, revenue going back into the SFP.

“When the harvest from our school gardens and farms is much, we will sell some of it and use the money to buy other ingredients like salt, oil for cooking as well as other school needs”. Male PTA member, Kishiy.
“The school sold surplus beans and we bought other classroom items”.

Teacher, GS Bongji

PTA members who benefited from the garden training unanimously said they also use the new skills in their home gardens, demonstrating the knock-on effects of ALIGN actions. Numerous trained cooks have already done cascade training within their PTA to bring hygiene and food safety measures into the kitchens and maintain a high standard.

“I was so inspired by the garden training that I re-started my unused home garden. We have people competing to become cooks in the school kitchen”.

Teacher, GS Bongji

2. Maintaining and expanding the libraries demonstrates the PTA and teacher’s appreciation of the importance of reading.

As reported in the earlier findings, the library component is one of the most valid ALIGN interventions for PTAs and teachers. One school has established a Book Fund (GS Yungkui), and another school has initiated a ‘donor drive’ among parents to collect more books for the library (CBC Kishiy). In every school visited, a space has been made for the library, including shelving, and locking cabinets. One Head Teacher is surrendering his own office to accommodate a room for the library.

Both teachers and PTAs cited the SFP and the library initiative as motivation for them to sustain improved pupil attendance.

3. Maintaining infrastructure is understood as the PTA’s role and responsibility; this may require some technical assistance along the way.

The communities where the schools are based operate with a strong sense of community engagement, and this extends to the collective ownership for the school and its associated assets. They routinely do small repairs and maintenance actions to the school infrastructure, and this will now extend to the kitchens, store rooms and WASH facilities. They are also prepared to organize some preventative measures such as behavior management for children using the hygiene facilities (e.g., new foot pump technology), however they do acknowledge the need for initial technical assistance in the event of repairs, and to include a budget line in the school budget for spare parts, etc.

Where tap stands have been installed, some PTAs are considering whether to allow community access to the water stands. The concern is how to manage this – should there be a schedule and overseer? Who is responsible if breakage occurs? PTAs state they will be able to draw up a policy depending on their decision, and communicate it formally to the local community. As for the solar-powered water tanks, no

one is yet aware of what might be necessary to keep the system in good condition, and they expressed the need to be oriented and informed.

4. Teachers believe the effects of their own teacher training will be sustained through application in the classroom, however there is uncertainty about sustaining the frequency, variety, and quality of future in-Service Training. They also reinforce the PTA support for SFP.

Teachers did say that among themselves at their schools they organize peer trainings, and occasionally the PTA may find funding for transport to send a teacher to a seminar. Given that it is 'early days' for the teacher training component, observations about the sustainability of IST as offered under ALIGN are only speculative. All teacher groups did reference the IST events offered regularly by the MBE, however these are fee-based, and the topics are not always immediately applicable in their classrooms as with ALIGN trainings.

5. Stakeholders are in agreement on the areas of sustainability – maybe more so in terms of teachers retaining new knowledge and skills.

Government officials and TTC facilitators seem confident that the teacher training program will have a long-term effect on the quality of classroom learning, even if there is no mechanism post-project to continue such a component. However, all said that it depends on the quality and frequency of supportive supervision *now*. The DPA respondents especially emphasized the need to become acquainted with all aspects of the ALIGN program, and implied that they needed 'buy-in', i.e., payment for supervision duties. Yet, the IPE noted that there are signs throughout the halls of the MBE which state clearly that all services are free, and an anti-corruption policy is in full force.

6. Some actions are not sustainable, according to the respondents.

All respondent groups do not feel that the THR will be sustainable. At the same time, there was the balanced opinion that due to community mobilization efforts, "girls will continue to come to school even without the THR because the communities are now aware of the benefits of education". Mention was made of the eventual transition in the school food plate from rice to local foods; children much prefer rice to local starches. Concerns were expressed on maintaining dietary diversity after the commodities finish, although substituting one starch for another is not a compromise on dietary diversity.

The majority of teachers said the ALIGN registers for tracking attendance and school feeding will not be sustained after the project concludes. Most felt the tally was double-counting and consumed time they don't have.

Finally, the one-time injection of school supplies (maps, notebooks, pencils, rulers, etc.) is not sustainable, and some parents expressed regret that future students coming through the grades will not benefit. Despite the national MBE policy of a 'minimum package' for all schools, this apparently is insufficient. One head master indicated that funds are 'skimmed' as they travel down from the national to the local level.

J. Do stakeholders still view ALIGN's results framework as relevant and valid?

Key Questions gathered input on the priorities and direction of the project e.g., 1), Improved literacy 2), Better nutrition through school feeding program (balanced diet) 3), Improved attendance (teacher and pupil) and 4), Improved teaching. As demonstrated in [A], respondents championed the suitability of, and necessity for the ALIGN model as a means to address some of the stated problems in the education environment.

“Children learn well and the community in general moves out of poverty with project activities”.

PTA member, GS Kishiy

“We see an improvement in pupil performance, and we link this to the school feeding”.

PTA member, Tatum

“My main priority now is to give a quality education. We have food, new structures, and now I can concentrate on promoting quality education”.

Teacher, PS Njombo

“The key will be if this is followed and scaled up; when ‘eyes are off’, will it still be valid? The key is to strengthen the relationships between the different stakeholders [so that] they become interdependent on the results”.

Government official, Bui Division

It would appear that the PTAs and grassroots school administrations are fully embracing the interrelated actions, and testifying to its efficacy. A critical factor for relevance and validity will be whether the Ministry of Education really gets behind the program, absorbing the training modules, acting on policy recommendations such as taking up the national school feeding program, and endorsing the role of nutrition in schools. The IPE could not discern a clear movement in this direction⁺. One other stakeholder, the Ministry of Public Health, has yet to be fully engaged, however the office appears ready to support the program, to be highlighted in the next section.

K. In which programming areas are ALIGN’s partnerships enhancing implementation? In which areas does the project need to strengthen partnerships?

The main partners who have a sustained role in the project include the Ministry of Basic Education, the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, the Ministry of Public Health, and a network of Teacher Training Colleges. Other ‘partners’ listed in Semi-Annual Reports are actually service contractors, and in some cases, have since completed their role.

1. Second-tier stakeholders understand ALIGN activities primarily in their sphere of operation e.g. agriculture, water, health – and express the preference for a larger role.

The ALIGN project has a good champion at the level of the *Government of Cameroon Administrative Division*, which is equivalent to the Governor’s Office. Members of this office appear to be quite familiar with the project, with the exception of nutrition activities, and the promotion of girls’ education. The team referenced their role in working with the MBE to discourage transfers of teachers who have received training, although it appears that MBE continues to transfer trained teachers. The Division Office is willing and eager to visit ALIGN schools, even to see the non-classroom activities. The office was vocal about building a strong relationship even through ‘non-formal’ gestures, such as Nascent giving T-shirts to his staff, and ‘inviting them for social discussions [e.g. tea parties]’. They stressed the importance of sensitization about sustainability after the project ends.

“The sensitization and workshops for sustainability could be greatly improved. This program is for them[population], and their ability to sustain it will be for their own good, so that there is not a lukewarm attitude...”

Government official, Bui Division

⁺ Readers should keep in mind that the IPE team had minimal access to staff at the Divisional MBE. The focal point was out of the office following surgery.

The key associated unit in the *Ministry of Basic Education is the Department of Pedagogical Advisors* (DPA), who will eventually be supervising teachers in ALIGN schools. Respondents in the FGD appear to have been only recently associated with ALIGN, and have yet to visit any schools to observe trained teachers in action. The ALIGN Education Program Officer admitted that to date they have not taken any MPE staff to visit the project activities in the field. DPA respondents acknowledged the school feeding component, the library activities, the gardens, and applauded the project's conceptual design of "feeding the body to feed the mind". Nevertheless, it was clear they have a bureaucratic mindset, requesting per diem to attend ALIGN meetings, and assistance with travel to school sites. They also implied that the program should be more under their supervision.

Other ministerial offices such as Agriculture, Water, and Health have new management in the last six months, and as such were not so familiar with ALIGN activities. However, during the interviews, all respondents underscored the logic of the integrated approach, and the importance of participation by their respective agencies. The unit at the *Ministry of Agriculture (MINADER)* referenced only intermittent contact with ALIGN; once with regard to the destruction of spoiled commodities, and once by providing some advice to the ALIGN Ag Officer on pesticides (ALIGN reports document more regular contact under the previous delegate). Under the current arrangement (e.g., no formal MoU), MINADER extension agents would expect a per diem or payment to serve as trainers/ advisors on the project. The unit within the MINADER that works with initiatives similar to school gardens is the Cooperatives Division – but PTAs would have to become formal local NGOs to qualify for technical assistance from extension agents.

ALIGN's sub-contractor, Caritas, is the main interlocutor with the MWRE, and has long experience working with water systems in the region. Caritas has yet to meet the new Delegate, although MWRE technical personnel accompanied Caritas to some sites early in the preparation stage. According to the Delegate, MWRE's primary interest with these works concerns the quality of the works, and water quality to be provided in the schools. The Delegate said that the water works 'belong' to the institution and it is their responsibility to oversee use and maintenance. Thus, once the plans are approved and the installation/engineering phase is achieved, there doesn't appear to be further involvement of MWRE. The Delegate referenced water quality analysis tests for new works should be conducted in an 'appropriate laboratory', none of which exist in Bui Division. Caritas compensates for this with measures that are taken in the survey stage, and in some cases undertaking tests themselves.

"When I see the [water] projects that have been completed in this area, I am not really concerned [for water quality], as it does not have a problem – due to borehole depth and rock formation. Some geo-physical studies are here for consultation, but we prefer the organizations do this...we have a standard for the contractor to follow".

Government official, Ministry of Water Resources and Energy, Bui Division

"We are drilling in a way that we don't permit surface water to get into the system, into the rock. We encase the water, so it is from deep rock."

Caritas Engineer, Kumbo

"...in previous water activities, we would do bacterial analysis, which we would do now before handing over the water activities to Nascent. But the level of depth excludes the possibility of contamination".

Caritas ALIGN Coordinator, Kumbo

A new senior official at the *Ministry of Public Health (MoPH)* expressed great interest in the project, emphasizing the strategic approach of working through schools to improve children’s health. This person advised project management to reach deeper into the MoPH to collaborate with the Department of Health Promotion for hygiene actions, and establish direct access to local health center personnel. This person also made a request for the list of ALIGN schools, and the interventions by school.

“The MoPH and the MBE have many shared links and programs, in particular for school-age populations with particular emphasis on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD). These include de-worming and polio vaccination activities – both of which I believe ALIGN has an interest in. For the monitoring, when the MoPH is in a campaign, ALIGN helps to track if the activities are actually done, and to help in the mobilization.”

Government official, Bui Division.

The IPE team met with 4 *Teacher Training College (TTC) consultant facilitators* who are designated trainers/supervisors for follow-on IST actions. The primary exposure to the project was during the summer 2016 Fantastic Phonics and IST training, where they were participants alongside teachers who they would later be designated to supervise on FP. Their familiarity with the whole ALIGN program is not what could be expected, given they are supposedly the ‘legs’ for the future support system to teachers. They heard second-hand about the library initiative, and were not at all familiar with the e-reader program (apart from one facilitator who has seen it at his associated school). Moreover, even though each one is officially on staff at one or another of the TTCs identified as close collaborators of ALIGN, they do not have a defined mandate to help institutionalize the ALIGN program concepts into their respective TTCs.

2. Partnerships need strengthening in the areas of exposure to the project: making field visits and more meaningful communication and information sharing, policy development.

As noted above, members of the partner institutions haven’t been physically exposed on a sustained scale to the project. The chief selling point of the ALIGN interventions is the school environment, and all that is happening there. Hearing the testimonies of the teachers, parents, and students can go a long way in gaining champions. It is worth the investment of some funds for a series of visits.

Secondly, partners would benefit from receiving summaries of key project documents, including sample materials. While they may have attended a launch event, or a workshop, they don’t necessarily associate the project’s actions with their Ministry, and may not appreciate that success in the schools is their success. Moreover, materials that are produced by ALIGN to be placed in schools currently do not carry an endorsement or approval by the respective ministry (education, agriculture, health). There are possible red flags here. Without some kind of written acknowledgement in the material, schools may not feel it is ‘authoritative’, and of greater concern, placing un-verified materials into the formal institution of the school risks censure from the ministries. A full ‘endorsement’ can be time-consuming and complex, as materials would have to go to the national level for the ‘seal of approval’. However, a note attesting to collaboration in the development of the materials could do the trick.

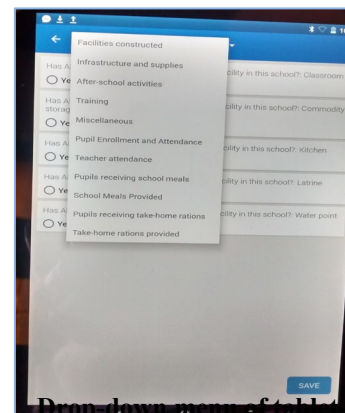
L. Does project data meet acceptable data quality standards?

Nascent senior management initially requested that project indicators be run through the USAID Data Quality Assessment Checklist – ADS Chapter 597. This checklist is geared to assess the quality of indicators at the Intermediate Result (IR) level. The ALIGN results framework has 9 IRs, with 12 output level results, and 4 stand-alone foundational results, each of which has a series of indicators. To conduct such an in-depth verification for each result was judged un-feasible, given the limited time. Nascent and

the IPE team agreed to conduct a proxy exercise with 6 randomly selected results. Ultimately, even this approach became impossible, due to lack of access to the cloud-secured database, and limited time with the M & E officer given the field visit schedule and the strike action⁺⁺. Nevertheless, the Principal Investigator reviewed some of the paper forms to collect project data, as well as the e-data system built into the tablets, both used by the FAs to generate the data. The purpose was to informally gauge the quality of the five standards as per the criteria in the USAID checklist.

1) *Validity: direct relationship, disaggregated data, qualified enumerators, error correction*

At a minimum, the collection parameters match the performance indicators registered in the Indicator Tracking Table. The M & E officer confirmed that he constantly reviews the performance of the FAs on data input, and personally coaches them to correct errors and assure accuracy. When asked how often errors do occur, he indicated that initially there were numerous monthly errors but over time, this has been reduced. However, some of the key data points pass through three filters to reach the input system. Head masters record teacher attendance, and teachers record pupil attendance and feeding registers. These persons received a one-time, one day training. The M & E officer observed that the possibility of error here is ‘medium’.



Drop-down menu for cloud-based data collection system.

2) *Reliability: consistent and systematic process, periodic reviews*

The formulas are set in both the paper-based and e-based systems for uniformity. A calendar is in place with dates for submission of data on a monthly basis. There are also some data safeguards in the tablets. For example, the number of pupils attending can never be greater than the number of pupils enrolled, or else the app will reject the figure entered.

3) *Timeliness: regular collection schedule, proper storage and readily available.*

FAs do their best to meet the deadline, however given they are often dependent on first generation sources (teacher registers, kitchen inventory, etc.), delays do occur. This appears to be the main challenge for the overall system. More critical for the current situation, the upload system is cloud-based, with no traditional, hard-wired system driver for use off-line, which would allow ALIGN to keep making transactions and sync data when back online.

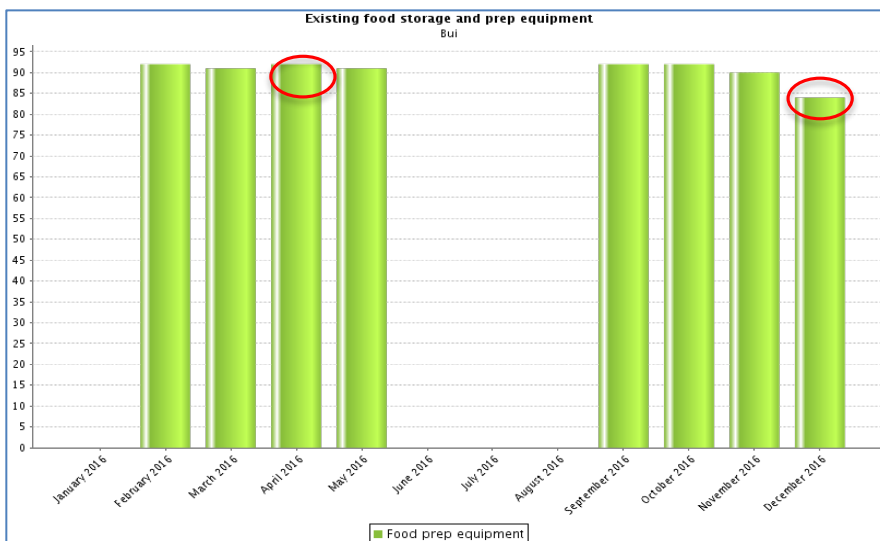
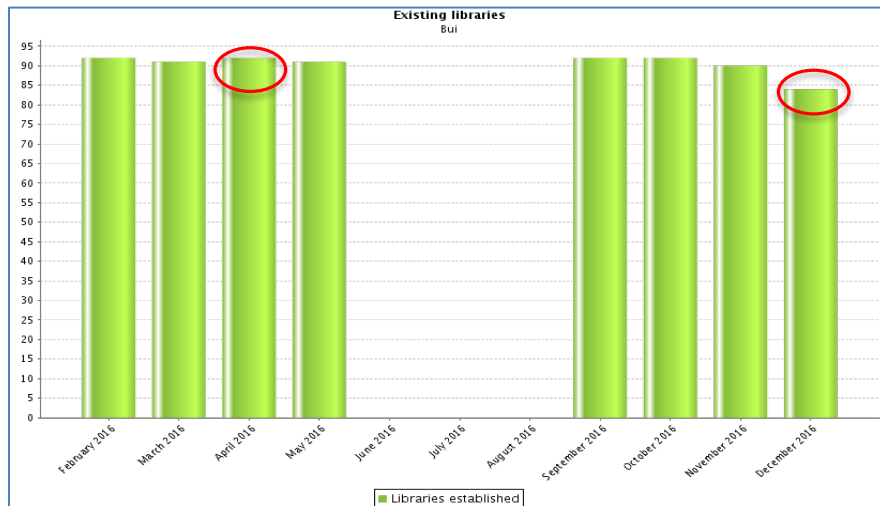
4) *Precision: Method for detecting duplicate data, detecting missing data*

The reporting format (both paper and e-based) is bound by the month of reporting, and provides for a previously established metric so that the information is carried over from month to month (e.g., “Has ALIGN ever established a library in this school?”). However, in consulting the cloud-based system from the US, in some months the maximum number of libraries is reported (92), and then in December, the number drops to 84. The information is contradicted in the November/December 2016 semi-annual report². This pattern occurs again in other data point expressions. This either represents a correction

⁺⁺ During the Kumbo-based period of Feb.1-18, strike days included February 6,7, 10, 11, 13, and 14. The IPE did meet out of office with ALIGN staff on Feb.13 and 14.

² “Of the 61 schools where books are displayed, six schools have displayed their books in secured classrooms. Only 53 of the aforementioned 61 schools are effectively using the library resources. 11 of 72 schools have not displayed and put to use their library resources as they lack secure library space”. *ALIGN November/December 2016 report-draft*.

from previous months, or negligence in reporting. In the second example, it is difficult to understand how food storage and prep equipment counts go *down*.



Images taken from <https://data.nascents.org/dhis-web-commons>.

5) *Integrity: safeguards to prevent unauthorized changes, need for independent review of results*
 This could not be verified. The integrity of the input enumerators must be trusted. At the level of the system, it is password-protected. It might be necessary to run a spot check on results once the system is back online, primarily due to the volume of data that must be uploaded in a very short period of time, which could be at risk of errors.

The Kumbo-based M&E Officer conducted a rapid assessment of three indicators as well, as an exercise. Please consult the annexes. Overall, the IPE had concerns about the ‘parallel’ alignment of data management, i.e., the reliance on the FAs and the subsequent verification only by the M & E officer in-country, and then again by the US-based M & E officer. The technical program experts should be more directly involved in reviewing data as it enters the system.

M. How much progress has ALIGN made toward its output indicator targets?

The Principal Investigator acknowledges that she was unable to report on this Key Question in a meaningful way. A brief examination of the cloud-based data system from the US confirmed that only some data points are current up to December 2016, but they are not cumulative, and without the guidance of the Kumbo-based M & E officer, she hesitated to perform any summary calculations to pronounce on progress toward targets. The reader is referred to the Performance Indicator Table (pages 19-22) of the September 2016 semi-annual report. Furthermore, given the number of output indicators, this would take a considerable amount of time, and is not in the SOW mandate. As a matter of procedure, this calculation should be made and the Indicator Progress Table updated as soon as possible.

N. To what extent is project implementation aligned with relevant national and local development policies and programs?

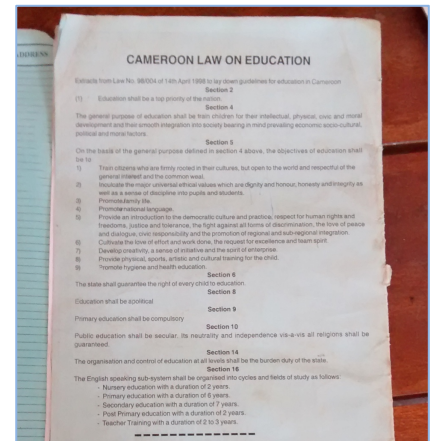
ALIGN is compliant with the authoritative priorities and strategies on education as outlined in the Cameroon Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of 2003, and updated in 2010. ALIGN contributes to the goals of increasing literacy (MDG 2), and improving gender equality for girls' education in primary school (MDG 3). Furthermore, ALIGN contributes to the elements outlined in Cameroon Vision 2035; Working Paper, issued by the Ministry of the Economy, Planning, and Regional Development, 2009. Finally, ALIGN is in sync with Cameroon's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". It may be said that ALIGN is in the forefront on this with the project feature of school libraries and e-readers. ALIGN is also a champion for SDG #5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". ALIGN appears to be the only project actively engaged in operationalizing the National School Feeding Policy pilot program, at least in the NorthWest Region. The project is building the evidence base that is needed to move the policy from paper to institutionalized program. Once the framework for the MGD Result 1.4.2 on Policy Development and Advocacy is more concretely operational, ALIGN expects to help the Region to fully adopt the policy.

V. OPERATIONS

This section offers a rapid overview of some elements that are not captured by the Key Questions. They include observations on management, staff competencies and satisfaction, training approach, and reporting. It also updates the Risk Management Matrix from the original project design.

A. Management

Senior management completed a checklist to confirm compliance on finance procedures, human resources, reporting, and communications requirements. Three levels responded, and all procedures appear to be up to date and in compliance. Please see the annexes for the full checklist.



Text page in all school registers outlining The Law on Education, 98/004- 4.14.1998.

At the field level, the organization and coordination of activities, and directing the flow of plans appears to be efficient, as evidenced from interviews with staff members. ALIGN staff have a holistic approach to program design and operations, notwithstanding the previously referenced concerns for some 'siloed' activities (e-readers and the TRC/ICT), data management and use, and lack of clarity on the Take Home Ration (THR). Kumbo-based staff would welcome visits of longer duration from the Country Director (from an average of 2-3 days to a full 5 days), as they feel his guidance and support from visits provides an injection of enthusiasm and motivation, especially during the period of strike actions.

B. Staff competencies and satisfaction

1. Collective understanding on some key concepts tied to results needs tightening.

An exercise during the preliminary orientation meeting to verify that all staff have the same understanding of project key concepts and indicator definitions revealed some gaps. If staff members are not clear on what is meant by "off-task", "short-term hunger", or "minimum acceptable diet", they will not be able to accurately communicate these concepts to the beneficiaries and stakeholders, nor will they be able to recognize progress on indicators. A handout of key definitions taken from the PMP was prepared and distributed to all staff at the time of the PPT restitution. See annexes.

2. Information flow and feedback is above average.

Front line responsibility for implementation rests at the level of the Field Agent (FA), and all program staff have regular and access to FAs. Reciprocal information flow from FAs is customized for the different technical units, as well as general monthly feedback, although mostly in narrative form. This is where the consistency between design, planning, and execution either holds together or dissipates. Notwithstanding some occasional disconnects in timing and thoroughness of execution, the frontline staff appear to be performing at better than average level. Nevertheless, it is critical to keep a close eye on their ability to understand the data entry and analysis mechanics of their tablet platform.

One staff member made reference to the risk of poor quality in cascade training among PTAs due to the 'small budget for supervisory field visits' to oversee and support such activities. The IPE was not mandated to examine the budget, so this claim (about travel funds) remains unconfirmed. Nevertheless, this constraint on field visits due to limited budget was mentioned by two other staff members.

3. Staff satisfaction with ALIGN as a project and work environment is quite high.

Staff members had the opportunity to express their level of individual satisfaction with the project and work environment. The parameters ranged from quality and quantity of material and equipment, focus and quality of professional staff, partner engagement, sufficiency of budget, supervision and mentoring, and opportunities for professional development. On a scale of 1 to 5, the majority of scores were between 3.2 and 4.4. Please consult the annexes for more details.

4. Risk management assessment update reveals some re-alignment of concerns and focus for attention.

The potential risks outlined in the original project documents were organized according to probability of occurrence and potential impact on the project, and rated low, medium or high in both categories. All staff were invited to re-assess the risks at this point in time, and re-assign as they best understood the situation. See the annexes for a graphic illustration of the movement of risks.

Seven potential risks actually moved from high and/or medium, to medium low or low, including:

- Admin/Teachers resistant to outside involvement (community/ALIGN);
- Limited capacity to design/deliver in-service training;
- “Ownership of project and assets;
- Lack of capacity (partners) or interest (community)’
- Poor construction process;
- Loss of commodities in main storage; and
- Limited capacity to design/deliver In-Service Training.

Five potential risks moved from low/medium, to medium/high, including:

- Under-utilization of the Teacher Resource Centre;
- Delays to project;
- Weather disruptions;
- Turnover of trained beneficiaries; and
- Loss of instructional time.

Two risk scenarios which did not change deserve some attention. *Unintended negative consequences of incentives* remained at ‘high probability and medium impact’. This likely reflects the confusion surrounding the TRH. The other risk of *scope creep* remained at medium/high probability and high impact. This reflects the real possibility that the community’s desire to expand the gardening/farming component could lead the project away from the education focus.

Another concern surfaced. Quite a few of the ALIGN staff stated they felt the teachers should receive material compensation – either financial or food – from ALIGN. Management should have a thorough discussion with all staff to vet the topic and explain that this is not feasible under USDA rules, nor is it a sustainable approach.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The IPE is satisfied that the theory of change is valid and that the process works (e.g., literacy improvement through a school feeding program) even if the outcome to date is less than what could be expected. All discussions and inquiries suggest that stakeholders see a clear synergy between the project components, as the value and performance of the combined activities are producing greater effect than if they are stand-alone units. Nonetheless, there are lost opportunities to groom champions and spokespersons by not sharing more in-depth information on a regular basis with stakeholders.

Front line workers (Field Agents) are dedicated and attentive, however greater field presence by program staff appears to be desired and necessary. Design and execution integrity risk being diluted. FAs also need the support and authoritative credibility from the technical experts. As an example, FAs are tasked with monitoring teachers implementing Fantastic Phonics via data points in the tablets. However, the FAs are not teachers themselves, although they were involved in the one-time FP training.

The delays in implementation due to the current political crisis may erode gains in teacher performance achievements, and pupils will lose reading skills, noted elsewhere as ‘the summer slide’. The recently submitted Revised FY17 Work Plan acknowledges these concerns, and proposes some mitigation actions, such as a temporary mobile reading program. It will be essential that the project’s front line workers are well-oriented and prepared, so that there is minimal logistical confusion, and valuable reading materials are not lost or damaged.

The risk of scope creep lies particularly with the gardens/farming activities, but it is also the arena with much potential for future NSI engagement. The communities see both the potential for expanded production and the challenges of addressing water shortages. Stakeholders must keep in mind that the end goal is a school feeding program, and the system for this should hold together wherever the food comes from. The role and scope of involvement by MINADER must be balanced to protect this construct. The Agriculture component currently has a number of actions and strategies that bear close observation and monitoring to serve as evidence and foundational elements for a possible associated program, rather than fully expanding within the parameters of the existing component. These include:

- Management of the irrigation systems leading from the water tanks (water consumption on gardens shouldn't compromise the other hygiene uses);
- Garden beds assigned to students' families for 'ownership';
- School feeding basket fund for sale of perishable produce (use of funds);
- Request for postharvest management training (storage, drying/preserving);
- Request for expanded gardens and farm size (involving more project resources);
- Speculation that future SFPs would *purchase* yields from local farms.

The e-technology components shouldn't be under-estimated or under-used. While the e-reader pilot is a micro endeavor at this stage, it has tremendous potential to be the link to future scale-up programming and funding. It deserves more integrated programming attention, including use in the health and hygiene component, and especially a robust monitoring system to build the evidence base. Furthermore, the ICT trainings and the TRC should also be better integrated into the overall approach. eLearning will make teaching and learning easier and more efficient for teachers, not more complex, and as such it shouldn't be treated as an extra-curricular activity for teachers.

Ownership at the school and community level is solid, but not enough to take the program into the institutional framework. The parents and teachers are deeply invested. For the parents, they do the gardens, their kids eat the produce. Teachers' improved performance on reading skills are noted by parents who see the impact on their children who come home with stories of reading and books. All rejoice in the improved pupil attendance. Food is driving them to come to school, reading keeps them coming back. The MBE and the MPH must see the cost/benefit, and how this project has solutions to the very problems they have in their portfolios. Ultimately, the models and mechanisms promoted in this project must be embedded in formal institutions to have long lasting impact.

ALIGN is losing out on the current consultant arrangement with TTC facilitators. Under the terms of reference for the facilitators, there is no obligation to build linkages back to their TTC. Facilitators described the TTCs as 'feeder institutions' to schools, such is the potential to influence quality teacher training. As it stands now, they reap the professional benefits of being trained by ALIGN, then the financial benefits of serving as a consultant for ALIGN. What do the TTCs get from them? Even ALIGN loses the acquired professional and intellectual capital once the consultancy is completed, and the facilitators move on.

Policy development cannot be left to consultants or mid-level program staff. The current plan as designed will not contribute to the required result MGD 1.4.2. The School Liaison Officer (SLO) task load is already burdensome, but more pointedly, the SLO position is focused 'down' the hierarchy, whereas the policy work must go up the hierarchy, taking the SLO away from the field. Policy development activities require technical expertise and input, and lobbying and negotiation at the level of Country Director, or Project Manager at a minimum. The outcome accrues to the reputation of NSI – one way or another.

Furthermore, outsourcing the activities to a consultant reduces the internal capacity-building and intellectual capital gains for ALIGN/NSI.

The effect to which the program can have impact in the policy environment will depend on good use of good evidence. The project has the advantage of a national school feeding policy on the books. The government needs regular, valid documentation and evidence that it works. ALIGN is the only laboratory for testing the NSFP in real conditions. This, along with constant accountability reminders to government about the SDGs, the PRSP, and Vision 2035 should be part of the basic pillars for ALIGN’s strategy for MGD Result 1.4.2.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Internal for management, short-term (now > 6 months/August 2017).

Gear up to catch up – use the down time well. The ‘summer slide’ phenomenon is not unique to students, as it can affect professional standards and morale among the project staff. Furthermore, there are tasks and activities that appear to be dragging on or out, such as production of print materials, checklists, etc. IPE suggests the following:

Technical/Program Sectors	Training	M & E (in association with program)	Logistics
Share key documentation with partners to reinforce their understanding of the project.	Pull together handouts to accompany all trainings as key takeaway products- including certificates of achievement (for PTAs as well)	Tighten data quality as per USAID assessment criteria.	Set up a ‘P’ drive on a central computer to house all key project documentation, and make it required reading for all staff to refresh their knowledge.
Take partners on field visits, even though schools are closed. They need to see the full package.	Refresher sessions for FAs	Education Sector: Finalize teacher supervision checklists and set up the database.	Review the budget to find additional funds for increased field visits by program/technical staff.
Thoroughly orient program staff on e-reader program and ICT training package – look for integration into their sector areas	Keep the TRC busy with training, research, etc. Make it clear to teachers the TRC is theirs.	Get e-reader monitoring and assessment tools into the system.	Require consultant engineer to tighten construction standards.
Finalize and operationalize the MPH MOU		M & E officer get program staff involved in data input review and verification.	Caritas share water works plans (including solar panels) with PTAs for future maintenance & repair needs.
Ensure ministerial ‘seal of approval’ on materials that go into schools.		Tighten the handwashing observation tools, and associate MPH.	CD plan visits for longer periods.
Caritas make overtures to the new Delegate at MWRE to build the alliance, and share results from the surveys.			

B. Intensify operationalization and partner consolidation - (now > 18 months/Dec.2018).

Double down on the FY17 Work Plan. Depending on the outcome of the strike action, ALIGN should decide how to proceed as a school-based project. The essential context of this project is to position schools as a center of learning, innovation, and space for educational progress. The school is not just a physical space; it is the institution and the formal link for PTA to the education sector. IPE observations were that parents were proud to be associated with the learning setting. ALIGN should not risk converting the project to a community development initiative, and opening it to scope creep. A strategic decision to maintain a ‘virtual school environment’ will keep the project grounded, and retain its authority in the formal education sector. IPE suggests the following (in addition to the Work Plan):

Technical/Program Sectors	Training	M & E	Logistics
Revise the obligations of the TTC facilitators to include presentations, working groups, etc. to their peers inside their TTC.	Train all staff on use of e-readers and e-tablets.	Review capacity of FA tablets, and upload capacity-building tools.	ICT focal point locate more e-reader products and do massive download.
Revise the Policy component, and begin campaign-style strategy.	Review training procedures for facilitation of cascade training.	Build off-line system for data management**.	Obtain French language books for libraries from French Embassy/Cultural Center.
Investigate the possibility/necessity of a monetization plan for commodities through the PTAs.*			Investigate the possibility/necessity of obtaining a waiver for expiration dates on commodities.
Prepare Cost Extension and/or No-cost Extension.	Consider PTA cross-visits.		Convert oil cans and commodities bags to usable assets for PTAs.
Senior management pursue network expansion and alliances with e-learning initiatives on the African continent.	Codify Fantastic Phonics Peer training within schools – trained teachers become ‘Master Teachers’.		Caritas investigate the exploitation of extra solar energy for electrification at schools when water tanks are full.
Seek to expand the e-reader pilot program based on evidence collected.			
Institutionalize all training and guidance into respective formal Institutions.			
Develop follow-on project proposals for school farm cooperatives; mobile libraries, computer technologies in schools.			

* Were the commodities to be allocated to PTAs, there might be no need for a Bellmon Analysis (potential market disruption). A grant mechanism could be developed, with commodities serving in the place of cash awards. A campaign period could be opened for sales. Parameters would be set, such as no sales on the open market, and a limit on the volume that could be sold to one entity, and no commodities to be transported out of the delineated geographical area. PTAs would be coached to draft a simple ‘business plan’ on how they would use the funds for the benefit of the school.