CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Please note: Board papers are deliberative in nature and, in accordance with the GPE Transparency Policy, are only considered to be public documents after their appraisal by the Board at the Board meeting. It is understood that constituencies will circulate Board documents among their members prior to the Board meeting for consultation purposes.

1. Overview

1.1 We are in the middle of the worst education crisis of our lifetimes with the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting education for nearly 1.6 billion learners across the world. The pandemic has already exacerbated education disparities, especially for girls and the most marginalized. Twenty-five years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, improvements in girls' education is at risk of being set back by decades. The longer schools are closed, the longer girls are exposed to heightened risks of gender-based violence, early and forced marriage, and early and unintended pregnancy, exploitation and trafficking—these are just some of the consequences outlined in the open letter to mark Beijing +25. Up to 24 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) could drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone, according to the UN.

1.2 Yet, we also know that we have the tools to mitigate these potential setbacks. GPE moved quickly to support partner countries with planning and implementing responses to the pandemic. We made available more than US$500 million, including a COVID-19 Accelerated Funding window consisting of US$475 million in country grants and a US$25 million global grant as well as a US$8.8 million global education sector plan development grant. Developing country governments are using GPE funds, along with their own resources, to improve access to remote learning, support the safe reopening of schools, and strengthen the resilience of their education systems to respond to future emergencies. Full details of GPE's COVID-19 support, including individual country plans and grant approvals and analysis of the portfolio, are available here.

1.3 While the world rightly focuses on managing the immediate health and mortality impact of the pandemic, we have worked with others to highlight the education crisis and were successful in securing global media attention. I wrote a piece with David Edwards of Education International in the Washington Post about the importance of treating teachers as front-line workers and in The Telegraph with Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen of Plan International and Tiffany Drake of the Girls

Opportunity Alliance on the impact of COVID-19 on girls' education. I sat down with the Economist to discuss the devastating impacts of school closures on developing countries, interviewed with CNBC Africa, and discussed education policy after COVID-19 with the New Statesman and Al Jazeera. I was pleased to participate in a webinar on domestic financing organized by David Archer of ActionAid. I encourage you to read GPE's blog series on financing education, which solicited interesting pieces from thought leaders around the world. I also spoke at several UN gatherings, including a member state briefing on education disruption and a side event of the High-Level Political Forum. We continue to work closely with multilateral partners on the COVID-19 response, including the Save Our Future campaign designed to highlight education needs and the UN Secretary-General's recent policy brief. I also engaged in the Global Education Coalition, led by UNESCO. I could not agree more with the Secretary-General that we have a generational opportunity to transform education. We are seeing innovative approaches to education delivery supported by our grants and we have now an opportunity to support partner countries to scale these up and transform education systems.

1.4 Transformation is at the heart of our ongoing work on the new strategic plan. In June, the Board approved a new vision, mission, goal and objectives, together with defining priority areas. Consultations have continued across constituencies through July and August. In September, the focus will be to conclude a high-level strategy outline, decide on the rallying cry for the Case for Investment, set directions on financing and funding approaches, and discuss next steps on the new operating model. The outcomes of the Board's deliberations will not only move us closer to the finalization of the strategic planning process in December, it will also enable us to conclude a Case for Investment and launch our financing campaign.

1.5 2020 has been an unprecedented year in many ways. On the one hand, it is already a record year for approvals and disbursements with more than $1.12 billion approved and over US$835 million disbursed from the GPE Fund as of August 26th. These numbers will rise even further before the year is out. At the same time, we all are having to learn to approach our daily work in new ways. The Secretariat has adapted swiftly to meet the demands of a home-based work environment. I commend staff for their ingenuity and creative problem-solving, although I remain concerned about the long-term sustainability of the current arrangements. The internal reorganization that was implemented on July 1 brings together technical leads and country leads to enhance our support to developing countries; enhances the independence and stature of the results and performance team; and gives us new capabilities and synergies across the units working on grant operations and finance. While there is more work to be done, these structural changes position the Secretariat to more effectively implement the new strategic plan. Our European Headquarters in Paris also continues to grow with 15 staff now in place and we expect that to grow to approximately 25 by FY22.

The new visual branding of GPE, which I communicated to you recently, is being rolled out. The important country-focused Effective Partnerships Rollout work is accelerating and preparations for the financing campaign next month are proceeding apace (see Annex). Taken together these elements provide a solid foundation for success in pursuing our new strategic plan objectives over the coming five years and our financing campaign.

2. GPE's COVID-19 response

2.1 I have approved grants totaling US$432.7 million to support 54 countries to respond to coronavirus-related school closures and to ensure children are continuing to learn during the pandemic. A further $20 million has been provided to a joint initiative managed by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, that will ensure regional and global efficiencies and knowledge sharing. Remote learning solutions being applied in GPE partner countries vary widely, but three quarters rely on radio, television and print materials. These approaches ensure that the most marginalized children—those without access to internet connectivity or even electricity—aren't falling too far behind. GPE works with partner countries to ensure that grants focus heavily on the most marginalized children, for example by providing materials adapted to children with learning challenges or disabilities. In the paragraphs below, I highlight examples of initiatives made possible by the COVID-19 Accelerated Funding window. The speed and agility with which GPE established the window, scaled up funding to US$500 million, processed grant proposals, and moved funds to meet country demand has been widely applauded. Lessons learned from the application and approval process will be carried forward to inform our operating model. We are also planning to do systematic evaluations of these grants, information from which will inform both our operational processes and grant designs.

2.2 With GPE's grant and UNICEF's technical support, the government of **Eswatini** developed an education contingency plan and rapidly established alternative learning methods through TV, radio, and newspapers to facilitate continued learning from home. **Timor-Leste** is using its $3.5 million grant to expand its Eskola Ba Uma ("School goes home") initiative, which consists of a series of dynamic school lessons broadcast on radio and television, and made available in print and online. The **OECS** quickly mobilized regional resources and partners to develop the OECS Education Sector Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19. A US$3 million GPE grant allocated to the Member States of **Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** will support the implementation of the regional response plan, helping to ensure learning opportunities for every child.

2.3 In May, **Pakistan** received a US$20 million GPE grant, with the World Bank as Grant Agent, to strengthen the federal and provincial governments' capacity to respond to and recover from the

COVID-19 crisis while building resilience to future threats. With GPE's support, Pakistan will promote equity in education by establishing a new system of incentives for provinces to invest in the most disadvantaged geographical areas and encourage alternative methods of education delivery. The GPE program is expected to benefit at least 11 million students and teachers, of whom at least 50% are expected to be female. In **Papua New Guinea**, a US$9.4 million grant, with UNICEF as Grant Agent, is helping to ensure elementary, primary, and lower secondary school children can access distance learning and return safely to school when appropriate, while making the education system more resilient to future threats.

2.4 We have seen some innovative activities proposed in the grant applications that have the potential for improving efficiency and effectiveness of education sectors in the long-term. For example, **Lesotho** is establishing an SMS based reporting system to collect real time data on children returning to school; **Kenya** is improving the capacity of its Education Cloud to make remote learning materials available to 15 million users at the same time; **Somalia** is distributing pre-loaded MP3 players, and low-cost tablets to communities without remote access facilities; **Nepal** is making distant learning materials accessible to children with disabilities by adding captions, interpretations, and images.

3. Conclusion

3.1 School closures and economic shock due to the coronavirus pandemic threaten the future of an entire generation of students. If we don't act to safeguard education, widening inequalities will push millions of children, especially the poorest girls, out of the classroom forever. GPE support has helped partner countries mitigate the impacts on the most vulnerable children and protect development gains. But much more is needed to get children back into school quickly and safely. As governments look to re-open schools, there is a true opportunity to build back better, expand innovation, and tackle long-standing inequalities in education.

3.2 We have increasing evidence on what works to improve education and we also know that in an uncertain world, resilient and adaptable education systems are essential. By bringing partners and finance together, GPE is uniquely positioned to harness this generational opportunity to transform education systems and change the lives of millions of children across the world. I want to thank you for your commitment, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with you in this unprecedented time.

ANNEX A

GPE Financing Campaign

1.1 The GPE Financing Campaign will be launched globally in late September or early October, together with national launches in donor capitals in the ensuing weeks. The campaign will culminate in a financing (pledging) conference in mid-2021. The campaign approach has been adapted to a world of restricted travel and lockdowns with scenario planning for both the worst case (lockdowns through to a virtual pledging event) as well as the prospect of some countries opening up in early 2021.

1.2 Immediately following the Board meeting, the decisions and directions of the Board regarding the financing and funding of the GPE 2025 Strategic Plan will be incorporated into campaign materials, including the Case for Investment, and final arrangements for the launch will be confirmed.

1.3 As presented to the Board in December 2019, the financing campaign has four goals:

Goal 1: Significantly increase financing to the Global Partnership for Education Fund to enable more extensive support to DCPs ("Replenishment" of GPE Fund)

Goal 2: Diversify the GPE donor base to help secure long-term financial security, demonstrate global reach and reduce dependence on a smaller group of donors (Also part of "replenishment" of GPE Fund)

Goal 3: Leverage more and better domestic finance for education

Goal 4: Catalyze more and better external financing for education aligned to national systems and plans

1.4 Goals 3 and 4 are critically important to the overall vision of transforming education financing in developing countries and the political opportunity of the GPE replenishment financing campaign will be leveraged to drive these goals. However, the directions set for the financing and funding framework and operating model to implement the GPE 2025 Strategic Plan are the opportunities to have enduring impact. The financing campaign will seek 5-year pledges of support from donors to replenish the GPE Fund and implement the new GPE 2025 Strategic Plan.

1.5 While the pre-requisites for success of the campaign[i] remain valid - and progress is well advanced on each - the dramatically changed environment from the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on thinking and planning. Of the highest order are the challenges to education financing, both domestic and external, and, the practical impact on implementing a campaign in a lock-down environment. The urgency of bringing education to the forefront of public policy response

to COVID is clear and the Secretariat has stepped up work with partners to highlight the need to protect education investments. These have included a collective campaign under the banner 'Save our Future', which was launched in early August alongside the UN Secretary General's new policy brief on Education during COVID-19 and beyond.

1.6 The financing campaign will run on two parallel tracks: i) promoting global and regional visibility in order to ii) enhance GPE's brand value as a support to national efforts in priority donor countries. Demonstrating broad-based community support for increasing investment in GPE, through both civil society advocacy and the support of influential individuals, is designed to facilitate favorable political decisions.

1.7 Discussions with potential **co-hosts** (leaders of a prominent donor government and a prominent developing country government) are well advanced and it is anticipated that the leaders will announce their commitment to host in the coming weeks.

1.8 A **creative communications campaign** has been developed with the objective of influencing financial decision-makers by showing a groundswell of support for GPE's vision that every child should have a quality education. The campaign slogan, ***"raise your hand"***, presents a simple call to action that most people can relate to as a gesture that evokes a classroom context and a signal of commitment. The campaign will be amplified by champions and advocacy partners and adapted to different markets. It has been designed to be able to run exclusively on-line, if necessary.

1.9 Board members will be advised of the campaign launch and supported with communication assets to amplify the case for investing in education through GPE. Questions and suggestions are welcome and can be directed to the managers of External Relations, Geoff Adlide and Charlie Tapp.

[i] Pre-requisites for success of financing campaign (to Board December 2019; May 2020):

- Bold and compelling Strategic Plan, with ambition, delivered on time
- Strong results narrative
- Ability to move money (pipeline and disbursements)
- Learn lessons from previous replenishments
- Identify politically powerful and influential hosts and champions
- Case for Investment that includes justifiable targets and indicators that are sensitive to the volume of investment (more $ means more outcomes)
- Progress/reforms through EPR