

Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Preparation

GPE Transforming Education

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

iiep International Institute for Educational Planning

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The GPE brings global and national leaders together in support of coordinated strategies that provide every child with the chance to learn in a safe and effective learning environment. By supporting development programmes to achieve a country's education goals – such as gender parity, quality learning outcomes, and universal access to primary school – the Global Partnership ensures that investments in education pay off. We have helped improve national education outcomes by bringing partners together to develop measurable quality education sector plans, by investing in underfunded and strategically important elements of the plan, and by mobilizing the expertise of country-level partners to leverage their comparative advantage.

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- technical cooperation with ministries of education and other institutions that enables countries to make the most of their own expertise, while minimizing reliance on external organizations;
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Introduction

At the World Education Forum, in Dakar in 2000, the international community pledged that *no country with a credible plan to achieve the Education for All goals would be thwarted by a lack of resources*. Since then, the development of an education sector plan (ESP) has become a priority in many countries. ESPs present the policies and strategies for national education reform, and are a powerful tool for coordinating partners and for mobilizing additional domestic and external resources. They have become a critical instrument for governments to signal to all potential investors that their education policies are credible, sustainable, and worthy of investment.

The consensus on the need for credible ESPs is strong. However, what does a credible plan require in terms of government leadership, knowledge and data, institutional and human capacities, and dialogue among the education stakeholders? What are the criteria that establish the credibility of a plan?

> The purpose of these guidelines is to assist countries in preparing credible education sector plans. A second document, *Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal*, can be utilized to check whether the plan responds to the expected requirements.

In certain contexts of vulnerability, conflict, or crisis, countries may also consider the development of a transitional education plan, more short-term and action-oriented, and adjusted to the context and available capacities for situation analysis and data requirements. Specific guidelines are being prepared. However references to fragile contexts or vulnerability situations are streamlined in these guidelines.

These guidelines are not exhaustive. They should be adapted to country contexts and needs. They present an overview of sector analysis, consultative processes, policy reform, strategy development, plan implementation, and monitoring. They do not replace technical manuals on specific tools and methodologies that are used at the various steps of the development of a plan.

I. Principles of the effective preparation of an education sector plan

1. What are the essential features of a credible education sector plan?

An Education Sector Plan (ESP) is by nature a national policy instrument, elaborated under the responsibility of government, which provides a long-term vision for the education system in the country, and outlines a coherent set of practicable strategies to reach its objectives and overcome difficulties. It is based on a sound analysis of the current situation and of the causes of successes achieved and difficulties encountered. It should include implementation and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks.

The essential characteristics of a credible ESP may be described as follows:

a. **An ESP is guided by an overall vision**. The plan, for instance through a mission statement, indicates overall direction, including (i) the government's development policy, (ii) the approach the government will follow to reach its goal, and (iii) the principles and values that will guide this approach.

b. **An ESP is strategic**. It identifies the strategies for achieving the vision, including the human, technical, and financial capacities required, and it sets priorities.

c. **An ESP is holistic**. An ESP covers all subsectors (early childhood education, primary, secondary, and higher education), and should also include non-formal education, as well as adult literacy. It recognizes the need for coherence among subsectors, with a specific attention to the levels attached to recognized education rights and compulsory schooling, and reflects awareness that education takes place throughout life. The learner is defined as the central beneficiary of the education system, with recognized rights and needs.

d. **An ESP is evidence-based**. It starts from an education sector analysis providing data and assessments that form the information base on which strategies and programmes are developed.

e. **An ESP is achievable**. An ESP is based on an analysis of the current trends and thoughtful hypotheses for overcoming financial, technical, and political constraints to effective implementation. It should provide a framework for budget and management decisions. It is also recognized that strong ownership by key stakeholders largely determines ESP feasibility.

f. **An ESP is sensitive to the context**. It includes an analysis of the vulnerabilities specific to a country. Vulnerabilities might for example include conflicts, disasters, and economic crises. An ESP must address preparedness, prevention, and risk mitigation in order to strengthen the resilience of the education system at all levels.

g. **An ESP pays attention to disparities**. A sector plan should recognize that, within a country, there may be significant gender differences between girls and boys and inequalities between groups of students in their participation in education and the quality of education they receive. These groups may be defined for instance by their location, their socio-economic or ethnic characteristics, or their abilities. A credible sector plan must identify and attend to gender considerations across the plan, including where gender disparities intersect with other sources of disparity, and address the specific needs and opportunities of different groups.

2. What are the main elements in the process of plan preparation?

It is important that the process be fully participatory and include a range of stakeholders (such as civil society, teachers' unions, and ministries other than education), as well as the partners who will be in charge of implementing the plan at the local level. During the preparation and appraisal of the plan, attention should be paid to the quality of the process, as well as to the quality of the final product.

The main characteristics of the plan preparation process are as follows:

a. **A country-led process**. Being a national policy instrument, the ESP is first the responsibility of the national government, which has to make the final decision and take the responsibility for committing resources and for its implementation. However education is of national interest and an ESP has to benefit from a participative preparation process. ESPs are most likely to succeed if they are the result of a process led by the government and internalized by all national stakeholders.

b. **A participatory process**. The planning process should be accompanied by a policy dialogue that builds consensus on the development of the education system. It should be a participatory process designed to:

- allow political leaders and technical experts to find a balance between ambitions and constraints;
- raise awareness and gain the commitment of a wide range of education stakeholders.

The process should involve selected ministries (especially the ministry of finance), various levels of education system administration, stakeholders in the education sector and civil society, non-governmental education providers, and international partners. It is important to ensure the participation of a diversity of groups (such as urban and rural people, and groups suffering from disasters). The involvement of these actors can be through consultations during the plan preparation process and through structured discussions on drafts of the plan document.

The local education group (LEG), chaired by the ministry of education, is a valuable forum for policy dialogue between the government and its development partners. This mechanism will ensure mutual accountability between government and development partners. It will also facilitate the processes of appraisal and endorsement of the ESP by the development partners, and the partners' commitment to contribute funds for the implementation of the endorsed ESP.

c. **A well-organized process**. If a participatory process is to run smoothly and involve a wide range of actors, it needs to be well organized and supported by clarity on the roles and responsibilities of these actors, especially the actors who lead and coordinate. The following structures may be particularly useful:[1]

- A steering committee to oversee and guide the process. This should be composed essentially of senior ministry personnel, with the participation of other relevant ministries (for example, finance and planning) and may include development partners.

1. In many countries such committees and groups already exist, even if they have other names. Other types of structures may be considered according to the context.

- A planning committee to coordinate the technical work, including bringing together all ministry directorates and departments. This committee might be led by a chief technical coordinator, generally the director of planning. The secretariat of the committee might be the strategic planning team, which would be responsible for preparing the draft education sector plan.
- Working groups to focus on specific themes or subsectors (e.g. teacher education, adult education, finance, M&E, gender issues) which might be asked by the planning committee to draft specific sections of the plan. Working groups can be composed of ministry staff and development partners, including the civil society.

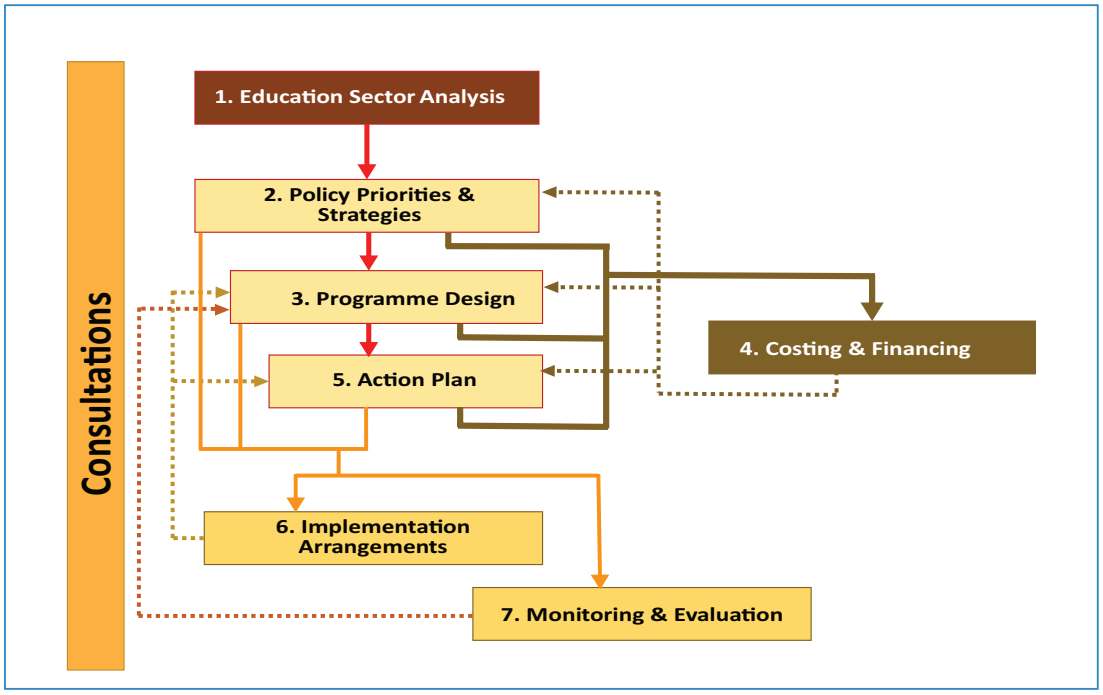
d. A capacity-development process. Because plan implementation depends on a wide range of actors from the education system administration, at all levels from central administration to schools, it is important that capacity at all these levels be addressed. Plan preparation is itself a form of capacity development, making the process of ESP preparation as important as the final product. Work on drafting a plan and involvement in consultations are of great value in developing knowledge and strengthening motivation. Capacity development includes setting up problem-solving systems to foster management consistency. Where external technical support is needed it must be delivered through the government, support national actors and systems, and collaborate with the LEG.

II. The preparation of an education sector plan

A plan preparation process may take from 12 to 24 months, depending on several factors, in particular whether or not a good information base exists, and whether this is the first education sector plan to be developed in the country. In situations where a full sector plan cannot be prepared (e.g. because of the impact of crises) or does not have to be prepared (e.g. because an existing plan is simply being reviewed), the plan preparation process could be much shorter.

Plan preparation is an iterative process. *Figure 1* shows the main components of the ESP development process and how they operate in an iterative way. The seven components are further described in the following sections of this document.

Figure 1. Main components of the ESP development process



During plan preparation, regular consultations with education administration personnel and stakeholders should take place to define and redimension policies, strategies, activities, and targets. For instance, targets may need to be revised after they are tested against available and expected resources. Strategies may need to be thought out again when detailed programmes are being developed. Implementation constraints may lead to rethinking targets and programmes.

The major considerations are **political**, relating to the degree of political buy-in to the plan; **capacity**, relating to the effectiveness of education administration and the skills of personnel; **contextual**, including the vulnerability to conflict and/or disaster risks; and **financial**, referring to the adequacy and predictability of financial resources.

1. Education sector analysis

The preparation of an ESP starts with a diagnosis of the sector. The purpose of the sector analysis is not only to provide a description of the situation of the education system based on data and indicators, but also to provide an analysis of successes and weaknesses, and difficulties encountered.

The sector analysis relies on existing data and analyses provided by the education management information system (EMIS), additional surveys, and existing research studies. Additional information is collected for the purpose of ESP preparation only for important areas when existing information is not sufficient. The sector analysis included in the plan could be a summary or an update of the main issues identified, drawn from a separate comprehensive sector analysis.

To build a strong diagnosis, all key stakeholders should be consulted at various steps of the process so that there is agreement on the key issues, the main determining factors, and the tentative conclusions.

What a sector analysis should cover.[2] An education sector analysis may be examined under various headings, reflecting the many elements that affect the design and performance of the plan. The following are core issues.

a. Context analysis. The context analysis covers issues with a particular impact on education, which can be listed under several key themes:

- macro-economic context: general economic data, public resources, and their distribution across sectors;
- demographic context: population growth rate, gender-disaggregated population data, under-15 cohort population, rural–urban migration;
- sociocultural contexts: homogeneity and heterogeneity of the population, the existence of marginalized groups, multiple languages, populations with low education demand (e.g. among pastoralists), specific cultural and religious contexts (such as regions with high levels of early marriage);
- politico-institutional context: political (in)stability, effectiveness of the public administration;
- vulnerability analysis: each national plan should assess the presence or the likelihood of risks, such as conflict, disaster, and economic crisis, and their potential impact on the education sector.

b. Analysis of existing policies. The purpose is to explore achievements under current policies and identify effective practices. The following should be examined:

- overall development policies that have a direct impact on education policies (e.g. policies reflected in poverty reduction strategy papers and national development plans, administrative reform, and decentralization);
- international commitments made by the government (to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Education for All goals) and the extent to which these affect ESPs;

2. See *Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines*, jointly developed by UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education, which can serve as a reference in conducting the sector diagnosis.

- official education policies;
- implementation of government decisions regarding education service delivery;
- large-scale partner-supported activities, including issues related to aid effectiveness.

c. **Analysis of cost and finance**. This should cover the national budget for education (domestic and external revenues), information on household expenditure, and other stakeholder funding. The purpose is to analyse the level of investment in education and its trend over time. When available, a public expenditure review on education spending is worth considering in the analysis. For instance:

- global government spending on education: expenditure on education as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) and overall government expenditure;
- distribution of expenditure by sub-sector/education level;
- average spending per student and a comparison by level;
- trends over time: total expenditure and unit costs;
- share of education expenditure (by government, households, and other stakeholders).

d. **Analysis of education system performance**. The analysis should be evidence-based and aim to identify issues and determining factors that explain situations. The specific situation of different groups (e.g. boys and girls) and different areas (e.g. those affected by conflict) should be examined. The following key topics should be analysed:

- access and coverage;
- equity in coverage and learning;
- internal efficiency;
- quality of learning;
- external efficiency.

e. **Analysis of system capacity**. This is an analysis of the system's fitness for purpose. It examines the effectiveness of the education administration at central and local levels, and the capacity of other stakeholders. It covers:

- organizational aspects: functioning of the education system at central, district, and school levels, and the roles and responsibilities of management at each level;
- public financial management;
- the competencies and qualifications of staff in key departments;
- the capacity to prepare for, prevent, and respond to crises;
- the capacity to examine and address questions of gender, across all levels and among all groups. In some cases, additional capacity to identify and address sensitive issues such as school-related gender-based violence should be strengthened;
- stakeholder analysis. The objective is to identify all stakeholders in the sector, private sector, civil society, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and multilateral and bilateral agencies, as well as their relative strengths and experience.

Information sources and their availability. Relevant secondary data need to be collected and analysed. In most countries, much information already exists, for instance through the EMIS, national or regional assessments, education sector reviews and specific research exercises, and household surveys. Documents such as national poverty reduction strategy papers and ministry of finance or ministry of planning documents may be viewed through an education lens to assess their relevance to the education system.

The importance of information gaps needs to be assessed. An early consensus should be reached on how (if at all) missing data will be obtained. It might be necessary to undertake primary data collection to obtain essential missing information.

It might be that not all the missing data can be collected within the time available for the diagnosis. If this is the case, **one component of the plan may be the development of a comprehensive information system**. The absence of complete data sets should not deter analysts from beginning the planning process when well-argued estimates can be made on the basis of the available data.

2. Policy formulation: setting policy priorities and key strategies

***The ESP should be strategic**: It offers a vision of a desirable situation for the education system in the future, and identifies the ways to reach this situation. It should determine a long-term vision, specified in (a) medium-term policy priorities set as goals, and (b) major strategies developed into programmes.*

As a national policy instrument, the ESP is influenced by the social development priorities and international commitments of the government. Not all levels and cycles of education are the same with regard to government responsibility for funding, service delivery, and support. The sector plan has to reflect the primary responsibility of government for the basic education cycle, which is related to the right to education and to the legal provisions for compulsory education.

A relevant response to the challenges raised by the sector analysis. The sector analysis will have identified the various challenges faced by the education system. And the policy priorities and strategies – as a response to these challenges – should be based on an understanding of the underlying causes and determining factors, thus offering a way to resolve them.

The identification of appropriate responses to the issues raised by the sector analysis results from:

- An explicit causal chain starting with the issues and weaknesses and the understanding of underlying factors, and leading to the determination of possible actions to be undertaken and to the final policy options selected (see also Section 3 on programme design).
- Subsequent discussions among the working groups that were set up for the preparation of the plan. Working groups should discuss and make explicit the causal chain and design responses. Public policy debates can also help clarify critical issues.
- A dialogue between decision-makers and technicians, leading to political trade-offs on priorities.

As a result of this process, policy priorities are translated into key strategies, accompanied by precise targets to measure the sector performance.

A coherent and consistent corpus of action. To be achievable, policy priorities and strategies have to form a coherent corpus of action and be consistent with the demographic and economic perspectives.

Developing education projections and using a simulation model (see also Section 4) gives an indication of the financial feasibility of achieving the policy targets, and allows decision-makers to explore several scenarios. The basic parameters in such a model include population projections, education parameters (such as access and transition rates, flow rates, class size, teachers per class, and pupil–textbook ratios), cost parameters (such as unit costs and average salaries), and economic development indicators (economic growth, share of government budget and of GDP going to education, and so on).

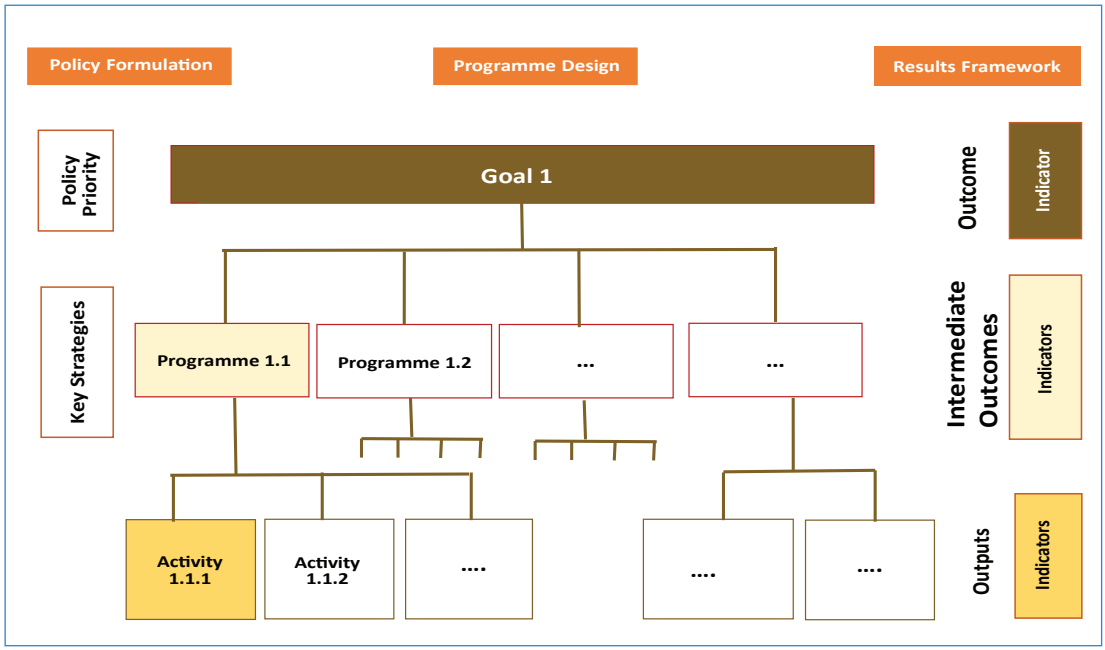
Once projected costs have been established, the set of ESP policies and strategies might have to be revised. As a result of the iterative process, the final version of the ESP should be coherent and propose a consistent set of well-defined policy priorities and key strategies translated into goals and programmes.

3. Programme design

There are many ways to develop and structure programmes in a sector plan (see the Additional Resources section). Here are some suggestions and considerations that can be adapted to specific country contexts and processes.

A sector plan should make explicit the causal chain, the rationale for action, that translates the challenges and their underlying causes identified in the sector analysis (see Section 1) into policy priorities and strategies at the policy formulation stage (Section 2) and onwards into programmes and remedial actions (Section 3). The expected results (outcomes/outputs) are measured through indicators which are summed up in the results framework (see Section 7). See *Figure 2*.

Figure 2. The causal chain of an education sector plan



For clarity purposes, it may be advisable to structure the plan by subsectors (pre-primary, primary or basic, secondary, vocational, adult, tertiary). In each subsector the challenges the ESP will address can then be categorized into thematic areas (access, quality, system strengthening, and so on). This provides a basis for identifying clearly and exhaustively each challenge, and for developing a results-based remedial strategy.

The overall architecture of an ESP is usually comprised of three levels, and has the following elements:

- **The goal or general objective**, which addresses a given challenge and is linked to a target as an expected outcome. For instance, the goal might be to increase access to pre-primary education, and the related target could be to raise enrolment rates in pre-primary education from 25 to 40 per cent for boys and from 22 to 40 per cent for girls by the year 2020.
- **Programmes or specific objectives** which address the underlying causes of the challenge, and which are also linked to targets as expected intermediate outcomes. For instance, if the sector analysis found that low access to pre-primary education was related to an insufficient number of pre-primary schools, a high cost for families, and a lack of qualified pre-primary teachers, then the following programmes could be put in place: (a) extend the network

of pre-primary government schools, (b) extend and support community-run pre-primary schools and kindergartens, (c) abolish school fees and provide school kits to pupils from poor families, (d) establish an institution to train pre-primary school teachers. The related targets could be (a) a 15 per cent increase in the number of pre-primary government schools by 2020, (b) 60 per cent of the rural townships to have a community-run kindergarten by 2020, (c) the proportion of pre-primary students from poor households increased from 15 per cent to 40 per cent by the year 2020, (d) establishment of a training institution for pre-primary teachers by 2017.

- **Activities** with their corresponding activity targets or outputs. For instance, activities for a programme to extend the network of pre-primary government schools could include to (a) complete a mapping exercise to identify where to build additional pre-primary classrooms, and (b) build and equip 250 pre-primary classrooms each year.

Figure 3 is an example of a goal–programme–activity architecture with the relevant targets (expected results) to address a specific challenge identified in the sector analysis.

Figure 3. An example of a goal–programme–activity architecture



When all targets have been set for all subsectors, and all programmes and key activities have been outlined, a feasibility check might address the following questions. To what extent are the estimated costs compatible with the likely financial resources available? To what extent are the objectives, programmes, and activities coherent and compatible with one another? To what extent do the objectives, programmes, and activities address the key challenges identified in the education sector diagnosis? The feasibility check may lead to a reassessment of priorities and strategies, and to alternative or complementary strategies. It may be necessary to rethink the plan's objectives and/

or to include in the plan a capacity development programme that addresses the core capacity constraints in the system.

Stakeholders should be involved in this phase through technical participation in working groups or other appropriate structures. At the end of this phase, a broad consultation process should be launched to draw out the final comments and suggestions of stakeholders.

4. Plan costing and financing

The process of ESP costing and financing is about testing the financial sustainability of policy options and targets. The estimated costs of the ESP will be examined at regular intervals during plan preparation, using projections and a financial simulation model to eventually establish a reference scenario (of ESP targets and corresponding inputs) that is financially sustainable. Using a simulation model is helpful to automate calculations and ensure the consistency of the projections made. Cost estimates and financial trade-offs may lead to the simulation of various scenarios (and corresponding policy choices). This in turn will lead to rethinking and adapting the programmes and policy targets until an optimum scenario is found and there is a reasonable consensus among the stakeholders.

A credible ESP should be developed on the basis of a quantitative reference scenario projecting the development of the education system needs and resources requirements according to policy assumptions and targets:

- **Enrolments are projected** at every level, gender-disaggregated when relevant, using access and student flow indicators.
- **Human and physical resources requirements**. Using target indicators and norms on the conditions of schooling (e.g. assumptions on resource use: textbooks per pupil ratios, class size, pupil/teacher ratios), the plan simulates the human resources, equipment, and infrastructure requirements.
- **Costs projections**. The requirements are then costed using unit costs. This process gives an overview of the financial implications of the programmes and activities. The cost projections should be comprehensive, providing a good estimate of sector-wide public expenses foreseen in the ESP scenarios being considered.
- **Financial resources**. To project the domestic resources available for education in the future, a macro-economic framework should be used to review economic growth, fiscal pressure, and the allocations to sectors within the government's budget. The macro-economic framework must be discussed and validated by the ministry of finance.

In addition, resource availability should be carefully considered during the costing of the plan. **Funding gaps** are calculated by identifying the difference between the projected costs of the plan and the projected domestic and external resources available for education. If a funding gap remains between the costs of the plan and the expected funding from domestic and external resources, the strategies will need to be revised to reduce the resource gap. There may be an opportunity to find more cost-effective implementation strategies or prioritize policy targets.

The ways to fill the financing gap need to be explained in the sector plan. Household contributions should not be relied on as a funding source for basic education. A review of the potential funding provided by development partners should be undertaken, whether this is channelled through general or sector budget support or through earmarked funding for selected activities. The remaining gap, if any, represents the additional support that must be sought.

Revisions to the policy options and targets may be needed to narrow the resource gap to a reasonable level. In parallel, it could be useful to review the unit costs and see where they can be reduced by sharing information on best practices.

The process of developing a financially credible plan also requires dialogue:

- **Between the government and development partners**: It is necessary to obtain as much information as possible on all forms of external funding. In the past, most donor funding was allocated to projects, and most of the costs were off-budget. Most donors now provide funds in the context of an ESP, and many are joining pooled arrangements through general or sector budget support. All on-budget and off-budget amounts should be identified.
- **Among officers inside the ministry of education**: There must be close collaboration among education ministry technical directorates (including the gender unit/focal point where one exists) and finance and planning offices.
- **Between the ministry of education and the ministry of finance**: It is particularly important to create close links between the preparation of the annual plan and the preparation of the annual budget to ensure full compatibility between the two, and facilitate efficient plan implementation. The ministry of finance must be consulted to ensure full account is taken of the macro-economic framework and the projections for the education budget.
- **Between the government and local actors**: Many countries now grant more autonomy and authority to school committees. This can improve accountability, but may have policy and budgetary implications that need to be considered within the promotion of a fee-free framework.

The final reference scenario and financing framework included in the ESP should reflect the conclusions on the iterative consideration of the actions planned and the available resources.

5. Action plan

The action plan is sometimes referred to as an implementation plan or operational plan. It should be consistent with the policy priorities and programmes of the ESP. The action plan should be drawn up with a medium-term expenditure framework and be linked to the national budget process, so it can usefully feed into the annual budget preparation and oversight processes.[3] It outlines the detailed activities for a specific period of the plan, with information on timing, roles, responsibilities, and costs. The action plan could be a separate document from the more strategic ESP document, or be part of it.

The process of the development of the action plan facilitates prioritization among activities and involves trade-offs. If financing gaps are identified when costing the plan (see Section 4 on scenario and costing), it will be necessary to decide whether to revise, postpone, or cancel lower-priority activities.

A robust action plan increases the probability of successful implementation, which re-emphasizes the importance of structural linkages between the action plan and existing national planning and budgeting processes. The action plan or implementation plan generally includes the following information for each activity, in addition to an organization by programmes with their specific objectives. However, the particular level of information and detail will vary according to country contexts:

- **A clear statement of the activity**. This serves as a reference point in developing a work plan.
- **Time period**. This shows the extent of the match between the annual costs of activity implementation and the available funding.
- **The quantity of inputs**. Inputs are defined as the financial, human, and material resources required for implementation. This information is a reference point for the annual implementation report. They can help determine whether the implementation strategies have been efficient.
- **The quantity of the outputs and the unit costs**. Outputs are the products, goods, and services that result from the programme's interventions. This information is critical for the annual implementation report; it confirms the target for a given activity over a given period.
- **The overall cost of the activity**. This could be the quantity multiplied by the unit cost. The cost of all action plan activities needs to be within the overall envelope of resources clearly identified (using ministry of finance budget ceilings and confirmed development partner inputs) in the education sector plan.
- **Sources of funding**. It is important to use only those sources of funding that are actually available or are likely to be available based on current projections. Depending on the modality of the support of development partners, some sources of funding may be managed outside the regular national budget process or by local governments, NGOs, or other entities. If activities funded by these entities are part of the ESP, they should appear in the action plan. The financing information on the action plan needs to be compatible with the financing framework (see Section 6), which is itself compatible with the macro-economic and budgetary prospects.

3. Revenue estimation, budget call, budget formulation, budget hearings, budget adoption, and budget execution.

- **The entity responsible for implementation**. This gives the responsibility for each activity. The entity listed as responsible for activity implementation should initiate funding requests in time.
- The action plan also includes the **output indicators** from the programme to which the activity is contributing.

6. Implementation arrangements and capacities

The next step in the preparation of the ESP consists of defining the implementation arrangements and ensuring that the necessary capacities are available.

Implementation arrangements. Key questions are who is responsible for the overall implementation of the plan and who is responsible for specific programmes. Responsibilities and accountability need to be clearly identified. They should be as close as possible to the usual responsibilities of ministries and ministry departments. A good organizational chart helps show the overall structure of the ministry and the lines of authority. The organizational chart should be in harmony with the ministry's structure.

It may be necessary to set up new structures, as in the case of the plan preparation process. A joint steering committee could be in charge of assigning implementation responsibilities and overseeing the overall implementation at the policy level, while a strategic monitoring team coordinates daily implementation.

Implementation capacity. The ability of the ministry to implement its plans depends on a number of factors, not all of which are under the control of the ministry; some are the result of overall government policies. An analysis of the capacity for plan implementation needs to examine the following:

- **public sector management and institutions**: the quality of budgetary and financial management, the efficiency of revenue mobilization, the quality of public administration and civil service management, transparency, and accountability in the public sector;
- **the effectiveness of educational administration**: clarity of roles and responsibilities, link between roles and structures, communication and coordination, preparedness for crisis and disaster situations, and monitoring and evaluation;
- **the profiles (in particular the competencies) of individual officers**: qualifications, skills and training, incentives, gender;
- **analysis of aid effectiveness principles**: to what extent external resources (and implementation modalities) support the development of national systems and capacity.

The draft education sector plan should be reviewed against each of these factors. For example, the efficiency of revenue mobilization may be a particular concern if the plan relies heavily on the government's capacity to raise internal revenue. In the same way, it is important to reflect on the question to what extent implementation can be efficiently ensured by the management capacities of the ministry (at both central and decentralized levels) and its partner organizations.

Depending on the replies to such questions, it may be necessary to rethink the plan's objectives and ambitions, and to include in the plan a capacity-development chapter that addresses the core capacity constraints in the system.

7. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms are critical to ensuring that the plan is on track to achieving its targets. An effective M&E system should ask whether the intended activities are being carried out as designed, whether the targets of the plan are being achieved, and if not, why not. The next few paragraphs address the M&E arrangements and the key indicators that should be developed in an ESP.

Monitoring. A first step is to ensure the organization and procedures of monitoring. A unit or department in charge of overall monitoring should ensure consistency and coverage. The EMIS section of the ministry is the engine of the monitoring process because it collects and analyses data from all levels of the system.

The most important monitoring activities are:

- **Routine monitoring** within implementing departments. Plan implementation is monitored through structured meetings in the various departments, based on the targets and indicators contained in work plans that derive from the approved action plan. Similar monitoring procedures need to be put in place at the decentralized levels of management.
- **Periodic reviews** by the monitoring team or monitoring unit. Short standardized performance reports should be produced by the same departments at regular intervals, using the guidelines and tools provided by the monitoring unit. The reports might be submitted to a steering body to review progress, examine constraints, and recommend corrective action. Regular reports might also be requested from the decentralized levels of management.
- **Reporting** on annual plans and budgets. This serves to check that implementation is in line with ESP assumptions (including effective resource allocation, absorption capacity, effectiveness, and efficiency). Reporting on plan and budget should contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the ESP implementation.
- **Annual reviews**[4] with stakeholders. The monitoring team or monitoring unit should prepare a consolidated annual performance report. This will serve as the basic document for the joint sector review, which should assess achievements and shortcomings, and agree on improvements. Each joint sector review should serve as an input to the following year's annual action plan (including the budget) or update of a multi-year action plan. The annual report should use the same format as the annual action plan, and include unit cost, quantity, and overall cost information for each activity, as well as information on the progress in achieving the targets set out in the ESP. The same indicators should be measured consistently from one annual review to the next.

Evaluation. Evaluations are usually carried out at mid-term and at the end of the plan period to avoid potential conflicts of interest, guarantee objectivity, and increase credibility. Evaluation results are discussed with stakeholders at joint sector reviews. Mid-term evaluations are formative in nature and feed back into the programme implementation to improve performance. Mid-term evaluation results may lead to rethinking the plan's priorities or an adjustment of a plan's strategies and targets. Final evaluations are summative in nature. The intent of the final review is not only to evaluate impacts and outcomes, relevance, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability, but also to

4. If an annual report is prepared in year *n*, it will be produced in year *n* + 1, and will influence the annual planning process for year *n* + 2.

analyse the reasons certain results have been achieved and others not achieved, as well as to derive lessons for policy revision and for preparing the next medium-term plan.

Results framework, M&E indicators. An essential tool in M&E is the system of indicators designed to follow up on plan objectives and monitor programme-specific processes.

The M&E indicator system, or results framework, is aligned with the structure and organization of the goals, programmes, and activities that make up the strategies of the ESP (see Section 3 on programme design). Indicators are used to measure progress and achievement of established targets at the various levels by assessing the outcomes of the goals, intermediate outcomes of the programmes, and outputs of the activities.

A considerable number of indicators could be identified in the different programme matrices, and the selection of indicators included in the M&E framework should be done carefully. Indicators should be relevant and specific, and refer as closely as possible to the required outcome or output. Indicators should also be measurable through EMIS or specific surveys, and ideally contain a baseline to make it possible to gauge progress. They should be clear and easily understandable by decision-makers and non-technical users. Indicators should provide information about equity issues and disparities in the performance of the education system. When relevant, indicators should be disaggregated by gender and should provide information about marginalized or vulnerable groups. Lastly, the list and definition of indicators should remain stable during the plan period (even if some fine-tuning is necessary) so progress can be measured consistently over time.

It is important to use the indicators to identify the areas in which progress is being made, and to understand and address the causes of any lack of progress. This may require, in addition to indicators, reliance on qualitative information, such as information collected by supervision departments or through research. An M&E system is only effective if it influences policy and strategic planning.

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Guidelines for
Education Sector Plan Preparation

GPE Transforming Education

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Institute for Educational Planning