Global Partnership for Education
Provisional Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP)

Lessons Learned from the Pilot

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Acknowledgements

This report was prepared at the end of the first phase of the provisional ITAP. It draws on six country reviews[1] which were conducted from August to December 2021.

In preparing the report, we have drawn on the evidence in the ITAP reports and consulted other members of the ITAP as well as the GPE Secretariat.

We would like to thank our fellow panel members for their professionalism and wisdom throughout the ITAP process. It was a privilege to work with colleagues with such a wealth of experience.

We would also like to thank in particular David Balwanz and Johanna Van Dyke from the GPE Secretariat for their excellent support, guidance, and responsiveness throughout the pilot process.

All views in this report are our own and we take full responsibility for any errors.

[1] At the time of writing, the final reports for five countries had been completed and one (Uganda) was in final draft format.

Executive Summary

Overall, we found the Provisional ITAP has been a well-constructed and efficiently managed process. We believe that the reviews added value to the GPE country level process by providing an independent assessment of country status vis-à-vis the GPE 2025 operating model. The ITAP was asked to comment on the country's self-assessment of progress in the enabling factors and identify/confirm factors which should be given high priority in order to achieve the goal of transformation of the education system. The findings in this report should be regarded as preliminary as they are based on the completion or partial completion of a limited number of countries (6). In addition, it should be borne in mind that this report has been written from the perspective of the ITAP and should be considered alongside the feedback from local education groups (LEGs) in order to assess the value of the reviews.

All of the countries who participated in the Provisional ITAP presented comprehensive files which included education sector plans with a wide range of data and evidence and costed plans for the next strategic period. A number of ITAP members had previous experience with the countries and commented on the improvement in the quality of these plans over time. This may, in part at least, be a consequence of the countries' participation in the GPE and the FTI.

On the whole, we found the methodology, the guidance for the ITAP and the ITAP templates were well designed and fit for the intended purpose. The *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants (Updated November 2021)* and the *ITAP Guidance Note* provide detailed and comprehensive guidance to the ITAP and the LEGs. However, we felt that both sets of guidelines would benefit from clarification and simplification, especially bearing in mind that several members of the LEGs are working in their second or third language. We also felt that the evidence provided to the ITAP on implementation was less strong than the evidence on the development of policy, strategy and plans. The assessment methodology could be strengthened by increasing the focus on monitoring, implementation reports and the inclusion of independent evaluation reports, wherever possible. There appeared in some countries to be a gap in the *use* of data to assess the impact of interventions and inform adjustments to the strategies. We believe that a stronger focus on implementation will be critical to the achievement of system transformation.

The GPE operating model identifies four 'enabling factors' which are linked to system transformation: (i) Use of data and evidence, (ii) Gender responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring; (iii) Sector coordination, and (iv) Equity, efficiency, and the volume of domestic financing of education.[2] The model hypothesises that challenges

[2] *Draft Guide for enabling factors analysis for GPE system transformation grants (Updated November 2021)*

in any one of these areas could impede the country's progress towards system transformation. We found that there was some confusion in the use of terminology of 'requirement areas' and 'enabling factors'. This may in part be due to adjustments in the guidance notes and templates during the early stages of the pilot. There was also a tendency in some country assessments to deal with each enabling factor separately rather than as part of a 'meaningful contextualized dialogue around critical challenges across the enabling factors' as intended in the *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants*. We would suggest a further review of the guide and the country templates to simplify, clarify and make them more accessible.

All the pilot countries used the ITAP process to review the requirement areas / enabling factors and identify priorities for the next strategy period. However, it was not always clear what concrete actions the countries were proposing to take. In some cases, countries indicated that all of the requirement areas / enabling factors were high priorities and the ITAP noted that this might pose challenges for countries with limited resources. We also noted that there was significant overlap and interaction between the enabling factors that might make prioritizing one area over another difficult or artificial. We would suggest that countries be encouraged to address the intersectionality of the enabling factors in their assessment and to list the key bottlenecks that are preventing progress. This will enable the ITAP to make a more robust assessment of the country's current situation and provide a sound basis for agreeing actions during the compact discussions.

We found evidence of a focus on gender in the education sector plans and related documents in all of the pilot countries. Most countries outlined specific measures to broaden educational opportunities and improve learning for girls and young women. Several countries provided evidence of progress and set gender specific targets to achieve further improvements as part of the planned system transformation. We felt however, that more attention could have been paid to the intersection of factors beyond gender (poverty, rural livelihoods, ethnic background, etc.) which have an impact on girls' and young women's success in the education system. The assessment methodology could be improved by encouraging LEGs to include an analysis of the broader factors that impede girls' education and how they propose to address them.

The ITAP found evidence that sector coordination mechanisms were in place and active in all of the pilot countries. There was evidence of active engagement in local education groups from government departments, development partners and non-government organisations. The methodology allowed the ITAP to assess the level of engagement of the LEGs to a certain extent, although this was obviously limited by the

scope of the desk review approach. One country used the LEG self-assessment tool to review their performance. The ITAP found this particularly valuable as additional evidence of the engagement of the LEG members and their willingness to enact the principle of mutual accountability. The main gaps in the evidence on sector coordination mechanisms were due to the fact that several countries have not conducted joint sector reviews in the past two years due to the pandemic and other factors. This made it difficult for the ITAP to judge the extent to which the LEG members were involved in monitoring and ensuring accountability. There were also important gaps in the membership of LEGs in several countries in particular there appeared to be a lack of representatives from local community groups, parents and teachers. With respect to coordinated financing, the ITAP found only limited evidence of development partners (with the exception of the World Bank) using country financial systems to deliver support. The assessment methodology could be improved by suggesting that the LEG include specific indicators in this area such as the proportion of external financing delivered 'on budget'. It might also be worth adding a question in the guidance notes on weaknesses in financial management that might deter development partners from using country systems.

Allpilot countries presented detailed budget plans and most countries proposed to increase domestic financing for education over the strategic period. However, it was not always possible to determine the extent to which previous spending targets were met as not all countries presented current public expenditure reviews or the equivalent. We also saw limited evidence of the involvement of Ministries of Finance (or equivalents) in the GPE processes. We felt that this was an important gap which might bring into question the reliability of financial plans. Most countries have budget allocation and expenditure processes usually led by the Ministry of Finance / Economy. It might be worth including relevant extracts from these documents in the country files and encouraging the local education group to provide a commentary on education budget execution in previous years. This would allow the ITAP to make a more robust assessment of the domestic financing enabling factor in the absence of a full PER. The Secretariat may also be able to assist the ITAP by providing additional data on domestic financing trends over time in the country.

Several of the pilot countries have experienced challenges in recent years ensuring transparency and accountability for government financing. However, in the plans reviewed by the ITAP there was little or no explicit mention of the risk of corruption and no evidence of measures to reduce the risk that funds will be misused. This is obviously a sensitive issue but we believe that the ITAP process could provide additional incentives to address this issue by requesting evidence and providing external scrutiny in this area. We believe that it is possible to make progress on this critical

enabling factor by increasing transparency and monitoring the use of domestic financing and external aid for education.

From the standpoint of ITAP systems and processes, we found that membership of the provisional ITAP pool was appropriately diverse, gender balanced, and with significant representation from the global South. Members collectively brought with them several years of experience and understanding of education and politico-economic systems across the world and were therefore well placed to offer pragmatic assessments of country plans. The panel Chairs had complete flexibility and autonomy in selecting members from the pool to serve on individual panels, with the full support of the Secretariat. However, there were some technical areas and languages that could have been better represented in the pool, and we have therefore recommended that these gaps be addressed during the establishment of the permanent ITAP. We also recommend that due consideration be given to the addition of members with an academic and/or research background while retaining the pragmatism and real-world orientation of the process thus far.

On the whole, we found that the provisional ITAP was able to carry out its duties with a high level of independence, ably supported by the Secretariat which was scrupulous in adhering to the guidelines and ensuring that at no time was there any endeavour to influence or steer the deliberations of the country panels in any particular direction. WBG has well established systems for managing conflict of interest and these were also effective in preserving the independence of the ITAP. We recommend that these principles be captured in appropriate documentation to guide future members of the Secretariat in dealing with the permanent ITAP.

Inputs to the panel were generally high quality and comprehensive, with requests for additional information met promptly by the Secretariat. Detailed briefings provided by the GPE Country Leads were also helpful at the kick-off stage, providing insights and perspectives that went beyond the information captured in the reports. An additional step that could help strengthen the country panel's assessment would be hearing from one or two additional country experts, say from the other development partners or local NGOs, at the kick-off meetings to receive further independent input.

Given the nature of the process, some uncertainty around the timing of country panels is unavoidable, but we believe that it should be possible to reduce some time lags. For instance, once the draft ITAP report is sent to the local education group for its comments, it may be possible to stipulate a definite timeframe for a response, failing which the report may be treated as final. We also believe that there is value to considering when the ITAP process should commence so that it fits most efficiently into the country's planning process.

Overall, we believe that the provisional ITAP has supported GPE partner countries by providing an independent assessment of the country's status in the areas of the four enabling factors. Based on our experience of the pilot programme, we are of the view that in addition to supporting the partner countries, this assessment process has also strengthened the Secretariat's internal scrutiny and will hopefully provide a useful input into the Board's deliberations. The feedback from the LEG on the value added by the ITAP will be a critical additional perspective.

Annex – Detailed Analysis and Commentary

Area 1: ITAP Review of GPE 2025 Enabling Factors Methodology

Methodology and Assessment of Enabling Factors

Data and Evidence

The *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants (Updated November 2021)* and the *ITAP Guidance Note* provide comprehensive and detailed definitions of the requirements for data and evidence. There is a sound methodology for assessing this area based on reviewing the plans and supporting evidence in the country files. Most countries provided substantial data and evidence to support their education sector plans and proposals. The data was largely taken from education management information systems which varied in quality. Most countries identified strengthening the data and evidence systems as a high priority. The ITAP found that there was less evidence of the *use* of data and evidence to monitor implementation and inform adjustments to the strategy. The ITAP also found gaps in data at the district, provincial and regional level in most of the pilot countries and a lack of evidence of effective feedback to schools and communities in almost all cases. The ITAP recommended that more effective utilization of data and evidence should be a high priority in most of the pilot countries as a key factor to enable system transformation.

The guidance notes provide detailed definitions of the key components of data and evidence systems. We felt that in some cases it might be difficult for governments with limited human and financial resource constraints to include all of these components. There is a risk that countries might feel compelled to invest in complex education management information systems requiring access to technologies that may not be widely available, particularly in remote parts of the country. The ITAP felt that it would be preferable to encourage the use of simple and accessible systems that can collect basic data (enrolment, teacher attendance, learning achievement, etc.) on a regular basis through the use of available technologies.

Most of the pilot countries identified data and evidence as a high priority area and a key enabling factor. In one country the local education group did not initially make the area a high priority but responded positively to the ITAP recommendation to do so. Data and evidence can be transformative, but it must be timely, reliable, and available in an accessible form to stakeholders with an interest in improving the education system including parents and local communities. It is important also to recognize that there may be political reasons why governments or other stakeholders may not want to publish data, especially in situations where progress has not been as rapid as

planned. GPE could add considerable value by promoting a culture of openness and transparency, and creating incentives to publish data even when an intervention may have been unsuccessful. This will enable the government and the LEG to learn from mistakes and adjust plans accordingly.

Due to the pandemic and other factors, several countries were unable to complete joint education sector reviews or public expenditure reviews (PERs) in the past two years. The ITAP identified these as important gaps in the evidence base which limited the ability of the panel to assess with full confidence the country's status in the enabling factor areas. We recognised that these reviews can be complicated and expensive exercises and this may deter countries from conducting them regularly. We would suggest adjusting the methodology to encourage LEGs to conduct light touch independent reviews to provide data to assess progress without incurring the costs of conducting a full sector review or PER. Ideally, these 'light reviews' should be conducted at least once a year and provide input to the ITAP review.

We found that not all of the pilot countries provided the ITAP with reliable data on learning achievements. A number of countries provided evidence from sample surveys using EGRA/EGMA or relied on end of school examinations to assess progress in learning. However, this does not provide data on those who drop out of school and these exams are distorted by their function as entrance tests to the next level of the education system. The lack of reliable data on learning achievement is an important gap in the enabling factor area of data and evidence and we recommended/confirmed the prioritisation of efforts to fill this gap in most of the pilot countries.

Several of the pilot countries participated in the recent country level evaluation of GPE support. A number had also conducted diagnostic studies on priority thematic areas. These independent evaluation studies provided valuable supplementary evidence for the ITAP. While we recognize that it is not feasible to conduct extensive evaluations on a regular basis, we would encourage GPE to support regular smaller scale evaluations and studies in key requirement areas in order to collect independent evidence on progress. This would add considerable value by providing important additional evidence to support the ITAP processes.

The ITAP felt that the reviews of the enabling factor areas would also have benefited from more contextual, longitudinal data showing progress over time against key indicators. Several countries in the pilot have been receiving support from GPE for more than a decade and should be able to provide data that show progress over that period against key indicators. This would help to stimulate debate in the LEG as well as providing valuable contextual information for the ITAP.

Gender-Responsive Sector Planning

All pilot countries provided evidence of comprehensive sector planning processes which were led by the government with support from development partners and other stakeholders. Many countries faced challenges and delays as a result of the COVID pandemic in completing or updating the sector plans and several countries had not completed a recent education sector analysis or equivalent. All countries demonstrated a commitment to mainstreaming gender throughout their education sector plans, although we felt that more attention could have been paid to the multiple intersecting factors beyond gender (poverty, rural livelihoods, culture etc.) which impede girls' education. There were significant gaps in implementation data and monitoring of progress and budget execution were generally weak.

All pilot countries have made significant efforts to mainstream gender throughout the education sector plans. In all cases, there has been significant progress towards removing the gender gap in enrolment in primary and lower secondary levels. The remaining challenges in many countries were continuing high dropout rates for girls. It was also difficult to judge progress in girls' learning achievements due to lack of reliable learning assessment data in most countries. In general, poor girls from rural areas remain the most likely to drop out of school or never go to school in the first place.

A strong focus on gender forms a central part of GPE's policies, however we believe that there are many other factors (as well as gender) which prevent children from receiving a good quality education. There was some initial confusion in the ITAP as a result of the title of this enabling factor area in English which places gender first ahead of sector planning. The ITAP felt that the title in French reflects better the intention to consider gender as a part of the overall consideration of the planning process[3].

All pilot countries provided detailed education sector plans to support their application for GPE support. There appeared to be strong country ownership of these plans and development partners – in particular the World Bank and UNICEF – played important roles in providing technical input to the plans in almost all cases. There was also evidence of an improvement in the quality of plans in several countries which could be attributable in part at least to the country's participation in GPE over time.[4] The main challenge appeared to be a lack of effective implementation plans and, in a number of cases, unrealistic planning goals. Several of the countries were already one or two years into a three-year education sector plan which meant that the plans were likely to be of limited value by the time the GPE application process is completed.

[3] « Planification, politique sectorielle et suivi sectoriels intégrant la notion de genre ».

[4] For example, Kenya has produced sector plans for GPE and its predecessor FTI since 2005.

Several countries did not submit detailed annual action plans and lacked adequate monitoring mechanisms to track progress. There was also a lack of detail at the sub-national (district, provincial) level. This is a significant gap especially given the fact that in many countries the responsibility for financing and delivering primary and basic education rests with local governments. We understand that the GPE planning guidelines are designed to be used at any level of government but we found limited evidence of sub-national planning. It is possible that these plans exist but were not submitted to the ITAP. We suggest that the LEG should be asked to submit at least high level sub-national goals and evidence of local government involvement in order to allow the ITAP to make a full assessment in this area.

All countries made statements about progress towards education financing goals as a share of total government expenditure and/or as a proportion of GDP. In some cases, countries provided evidence to the ITAP of links between the goals in the education sector plans and the financing necessary to achieve these goals. However, the ITAP raised concerns in a number of countries about the realism of the ambition of some of the education goals and the targets to increase financing for education, particularly in countries whose economies have been affected by the COVID pandemic.

Sector Coordination

All pilot countries have established mechanisms to support sector coordination with a local education group (or its equivalent) in every country including representation from government, development partners and NGOs. All of the groups appeared to have strong country leadership – as evidenced by ministerial signatures and senior official engagement in the planning and application processes. We recognise that this is not always a wholly reliable indicator of country leadership and it may be worth exploring options for other evidence which could be provided to the ITAP to verify this factor. International organisations – in particular the World Bank and UNICEF – provided support as co-chairs and/or technical advisers. In one country, the LEG conducted a self-assessment of the group's structure and operations using criteria provided by the GPE. This self-assessment provided an impetus to broaden the composition of the group and to strengthen its monitoring activities. This is an example of best practice and will help to strengthen the LEG and demonstrates a commitment to improve mutual accountability.

LEGs generally had strong representation from government and non-government organisations but more limited representation from local stakeholders such as teachers, parents and local communities. There was also limited participation from the private sector and faith-based organisations which, in many cases, are significant

or even the majority providers of basic education. A number of countries have established thematic sub-groups and /or executive committee(s) to improve efficiency by allowing decisions to be taken more rapidly while ensuring that all stakeholders are informed and/or consulted.

In most countries, there has not been a joint sector review for several years and this limited the ability of the ITAP to judge fully the effectiveness of sector coordination and the strength of mutual accountability. The COVID pandemic has made in-person visits difficult / impossible in most countries since 2020, however there was little evidence of attempts to replace these with virtual joint reviews. The lack of recent, reliable, accessible data and evidence mentioned above also had an impact on the sector reviews and other sector coordination mechanisms.

There was limited evidence of increased harmonization, alignment and use of country systems in the pilot countries. A number of countries stated that there were joint project implementation units and joint monitoring mechanisms. However, there was limited evidence of the use of country systems by bilateral donors who, in several cases, continue to use separate project modalities with some examples of overlap and non-alignment with country plans. The guidance could be strengthened in this area with the inclusion of a key indicator to monitor progress towards the principle of "using a partner country's institutions, human resources, procedures and tools as the mainstays for the implementation of aid to education."[5]

In some cases, it is likely that development partners are not using country systems in part because they have concerns about corruption, lack of transparency and/or poor accountability. If this is the case, GPE could have a transformative impact by making these concerns explicit and using the incentives of GPE grants and technical support in order to enable countries to take politically difficult steps to improve accountability and reduce the misuse of finance in the education sector. This would fit well with GPE 2025's transformative mission by strengthening country systems - including finance systems – by using rather than bypassing them. We would suggest that the guidelines could be adjusted to encourage the LEG to address this area and/or provide evidence from Transparency International surveys or equivalent which would enable the ITAP to assess the country's status with regards to this critical enabling factor.

Domestic Financing

There was evidence of increased financing for education in the budgets of most of the pilot countries. This was reflected both in the share of total government spending and as a proportion of GDP. Although most of the country files included some data on

[5] GPE Guidelines.

budget execution, the lack of independently verified data from PERs or equivalent made it difficult to assess with confidence the status of all countries in this enabling factor area. There was also, as discussed above, a lack of data on sub-national budgets as well as private / household expenditure. In most cases, the government anticipated increasing investment in education – in some cases by a very substantial amount. The ITAP questioned how realistic the target increases were in a number of countries, particularly given the impact of COVID on government finances.

The lack of recent PERs (or equivalent) also made assessment of the equitable distribution and efficient use of financing difficult / impossible. Conclusions had to be drawn from assumptions about budget plans rather than explicit evidence of actual expenditure. There was also a lack of information and/or conflict in goals for some countries with regards to macroeconomic factors such as tax-GDP ratio and costs of debt servicing. These are important factors affecting the fiscal space available to increase investment in education. Countries should be requested or required to provide background documents from the Ministry of Finance (or equivalent) [providing the macroeconomic context including recent forecasts where these are available].

GPE's *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants* does not state whether the lead indicator should be education expenditure as a share of GDP or as a share of total government expenditure or whether both need to be considered equally. Some countries were meeting the first target but trailing behind on the second. It is not clear whether this should this be a major or just a minor concern and there appears to be an inconsistency between the ITAP Guidance Note and the Guidance for Assessing Requirements / Enabling Factors.

The lack of reliable data on national, sub-national and household expenditure on education made it difficult to judge whether education financing had been allocated equitably or whether budget plans had been implemented in a way that would benefit the poorest communities and families. In many countries, there is a continuing dependency on private household financing for basic materials, uniforms and, in some cases, teacher salary supplements. There is also a continuing disparity (in some cases very substantial) between per capita expenditure in basic education versus higher education institutions.

Another gap identified by the ITAP was the lack of analysis of the *efficiency* of domestic financing for education. Provisional analysis conducted by the ITAP indicated that there was scope for significant efficiency gains by, for example, improving the learning outcomes vs years of schooling ratio and by reducing or removing repetition rates. This might be an area where GPE could provide incentives to transform education

systems by strengthening the enabling factors methodology with simple tools for the LEG to assess progress over time on a limited number of indicators which would allow the ITAP to better judge the efficiency of financing.

The ITAP was asked to consider the volume, efficiency, and equity of public financing but due to lack of data they were not able to consider in any meaningful way the *effectiveness* of financial expenditure. While cost-effectiveness evidence is only beginning to emerge across the globe and requires some comparison data to make it meaningful (which is unlikely to be available at country level in most countries), it might be worth considering effectiveness as an additional category so that if an education system is increasing its spending, but the results have not been changing over time, some analysis can be added on effectiveness as well as efficiency.

Feasibility and Constraints of the ITAP review

The *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants* (Updated November 2021) and the *ITAP Guidance Note* provide detailed and comprehensive guidance to the ITAP and the LEGs. We generally found them helpful and we were able to answer the questions within the time available. There were limitations on our ability to provide a detailed assessment of the progress of the country in the enabling factor areas, especially given the limited time available and the desk review approach. In addition, the data gaps outlined above constrained our ability to make a full assessment, especially in the area of financing.

The ITAP generally used the Guidance Note as a starting point but adopted a holistic approach to the review, drawing on panel members' extensive experience of the complexities of education systems when considering the country file as a whole. We found the country's self-assessment of its status in each of the enabling factor areas extremely valuable as it allowed the ITAP to respond to an initial assessment conducted by the LEG who had a deep understanding of the local context. This approach allowed the panel to make assessments which were sensitive to this local context and to produce a report within a short time frame and thereby minimise delays to the development of the country compact.

It was not possible to carry out a detailed assessment against each of the guiding considerations in the Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis and such an assessment would not necessarily have been desirable as it would have reduced the ability of the ITAP to balance the strengths and weaknesses of the country's current situation with regards to the enabling factors.

We found that the language in the guidance was unclear in places and used technical terms/jargon that might not be familiar to all stakeholders at the country level who may also be working in their second or third language. A simplified, plain language

version of the guidelines would help to address this problem by making the documents more accessible to a wider range of stakeholders. It would also encourage the GPE partnership to explore and define the meaning of key terms such as 'system transformation', 'enabling factors' et al.

Linking Enabling Factors to System Transformation

The GPE 2025 operating model encourages countries to conduct a 'contextualised and multidimensional assessment' of their current status in the critical 'enabling factors' areas. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the GPE partnership to offer a more nuanced and flexible response to the country's situation rather than setting external standards or global benchmarks which may be difficult/impossible for the country to meet and may not be relevant for the local context. The underlying theory of change, as we understand it, is that there are a number of critical challenges or 'bottlenecks' in one or more of the enabling factor areas which, if they were removed or mitigated, the country would be able to make faster progress towards the goals of system transformation.

While we agree with this theory in principle, we felt that, in practice, the pilot countries found it difficult to identify and prioritise the most important bottlenecks/challenges. The prioritisation in the Enabling Factors / Requirements Analysis template was at the general level of the enabling factor. Several countries also provided a list of activities to address the challenges in each area but these were not prioritised. The ITAP felt that in several cases it was unlikely that the country would be able to carry out all of the activities planned in one strategy period and that it would be beneficial to identify a small number of critical actions which would be most likely to bring about significant positive change. It is possible that this further prioritisation of actions may take place during the discussions to agree the country compact. The ITAP also felt that the separation of the enabling factors had the unintended consequence in some countries of creating the impression that these factors are distinct whereas in fact they are linked and, as noted above, there are significant overlaps between them. It might be worth revisiting the approach taken in the screening tools to encourage countries to identify a smaller number of priority activities or interventions which may cut across a number of enabling factor areas in order to achieve the goal of system transformation[6].

The *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants (Updated November 2021)* encourages the LEG to prioritise the 'enabling factors' as

[6] For example, achieving the goal of improving education for girls in the remote arid regions of Kenya would require a set of interventions including targeting more domestic resources, coordinating development partner interventions and collecting better data and evidence in order to measure impact on a regular basis,

low, medium or high. The advantage of this approach is that it encourages the LEG to make a choice between competing priorities and focus on a limited number of factors that should receive increased attention and/or more resources. The disadvantage or limitation of this approach is that it risks obscuring the fact that the enabling factors are interrelated and focusing on one area will inevitably also require action in the other areas. There is also a risk – as happened with one country in the pilot – that the LEG will feel that all of the factors are important and will make them all high priorities. Despite these limitations, we believe that the approach is useful to stimulate a discussion at the country level, especially if it leads to agreement on measurable indicators of progress in the priority areas.

The format of the guidelines focuses on the positive enabling factors but does not ask the country to specify the 'disabling factors' that impede progress. It might be worth considering the use of additional systems analysis tools to identify barriers to action or sources of resistance to change that may prevent progress being achieved. This could include tools which examine the political economy of changes at the national, regional and local level. We believe that asking the partner country to propose specific measures to overcome these barriers would stimulate a productive discussion at the country level, including about issues that are politically difficult to address and often ignored. Lasting education system transformation will not be achieved without targeted action in these areas.

Contextualized and multi-dimensional assessment

The new operating procedures require the LEG to make an assessment of the progress and challenges taking account of the local context and the multidimensional factors that affect progress in the education sector. This approach encourages the local group to reflect the complexities of the education system in their plans and to present a nuanced set of proposals. The extent to which the country achieved this objective varied considerably across the pilot countries. This is perhaps inevitable given the fact that this is a new approach for all countries. The ITAP was able to make its assessment based on the package of documents provided but there was a considerable amount of professional judgement required. On the whole we believe this is the right approach but there is a risk of inconsistency and lack of objectivity. This risk could be mitigated by careful quality assurance of the process if and when the permanent ITAP is introduced.

The move away from global benchmarks - apart from the requirement to make progress towards 20% of total government expenditure on education - allows countries to measure themselves in their own contexts rather than externally imposed criteria which may not be appropriate. Most countries continued to refer to global

benchmarks – in particular financing and gender parity targets – but did not feel constrained by them and were able to explain contextual factors such as COVID which meant they were not able to reach the benchmarks at this stage. A few countries used the optional table in the country assessment template to indicate countries for comparison. This is a valuable additional source of support through peer-to-peer reviews and we would encourage the use of this mechanism in more countries.

Prioritization

Most countries in the pilot identified two or three enabling factors as high priorities. The ITAP generally agreed with the prioritization of the local education group although we did suggest changes in some cases. The prioritization seems to have helped to promote discussion at the country level about which areas needed to be addressed first and/or with greater resources. The practical value of the approach will depend on whether the decisions on general priority areas are reflected in country compacts, action plans and budgets.

The limitation of this approach is that the areas are, of necessity, quite broad and it is not entirely clear what impact the prioritization will have during the implementation phase. It could be argued that all of the areas are priorities and it is unlikely that a country would or should stop paying attention to any of these areas even if they are designated as low or medium priority.

As suggested above, it might be worth considering taking a slightly different approach in the next phase of the ITAP and ask countries to identity a small number of 'disabling factors' which are providing barriers to access to education. The country could then be asked to indicate which of these are high priorities; what actions they propose; and how they will measure success.

GPE Guidance and Tools

The ITAP found the requirements screening tool and the country analysis template were valuable aids when assessing the country's success in the enabling factor areas. The tools provided a degree of consistency across the countries and gave the ITAP a concise summary of the country context and a self-assessment of current progress. We felt that it would have been very difficult / impossible to complete the assessment without these tools in the limited time available.

We believed that the format for the ITAP country reports worked reasonably well and that it is valuable to include an Executive Summary as well as the more detailed assessments against each area. This is likely to be valuable for board members who may not read the whole report. We also felt that the addition of a table at the end of the report summarising the prioritised areas with proposed actions was valuable. This

table could be adjusted to include actions on addressing 'disabling factors' as suggested above.

Several ITAP members felt that it would be helpful to include a brief introductory section that covers the history, political economy, conflict, context, etc. for board members who are not familiar with the country context.

There were some differences in the approaches to the completion of the forms between the pilot countries. One country did not use the templates but provided similar information in a Word document format. These differences could be addressed in the next phase of the ITAP by simplifying the guidance, as suggested above, and possibly also sharing examples of completed forms from other countries.

Similarities and Differences in Country Files Submitted to the ITAP

The country files were broadly similar and generally met the requirements of the *Draft Guide for Enabling Factors Analysis for GPE System Transformation Grants* and the *ITAP Guidance Note* . Although there were significant variations in the detail and quality of the supporting documents. Most countries provided the information requested in the requirements screening tool and the country analysis. However, some countries chose to use a Word document instead of the template which may be due to some formatting difficulties especially when translation is required. The level of detail in the responses to the questions in country templates varied widely: one country (DRC) provided more than a thousand words in response to each question in the country analysis whilst another country (Kenya) responded to several questions in one sentence. There appeared to be some confusion / lack of clarity in the responses to some of the questions in particular regarding Coordinated Financing and Funding[7]. There was also confusion caused by the two sets of priorities in the country analysis for policies and requirement areas. Despite these inconsistencies, the ITAP found the country templates to be extremely helpful in providing a summary of the local education group's assessment of the country's situation vis-à-vis the GPE requirements. We would recommend a further revision of the tools for the next stage of the ITAP in order to simplify the language, improve clarity, and minimise the risk of confusion.

[7] Initial Requirement Questionnaire: Questions 13a, b and c.

Area 2: Early Lessons Learned from the Pilots

Independence

The strength of the ITAP lies in its composition, with members drawn from all over the world based on their experience and expertise in understanding and working with complex education systems. The selection process has been well thought out and executed by the GPE Secretariat, although there may be a case for considering the possibility of reducing the time taken to finalise membership. As a result, and because members who are selected to serve on these panels undertake and declare any potential conflict of interest, the ITAP is able to serve independently and impartially. In cases where there was a perceived conflict of interest, members recused themselves from participation, thus ensuring that the recommendations of the panel remained free of taint. We note that there were two levels of control to ensure this adherence to conflict guidelines – the first voluntarily at the level of the member, and the second at the level of the Chair who reviews the declaration forms, thus making certain that the panel's independence and impartiality were protected. In addition, the GPE Ethics Officer reviews panel compositions and declaration forms to ensure that there are no conflicts and consults with the Chair should the need arise. The Ethics Officer is also available to the Chair and any member of the panel in the event that they desire clarification or further information.

On the whole, we believe that the ITAP was able to perform its reviews with a high level of independence. Secretariat team members responsible for managing the pilot were scrupulous in not seeking to influence the panels and responded to our questions in a timely manner with the evidence or clarifications we requested. It was extremely helpful to have an initial conversation with the GPE country lead for each country in order to get an understanding of the context and background to the process we were reviewing, who also were careful not to attempt to steer the panel in any particular direction. The panel's impartiality was protected by a very thorough process to review and assess any potential conflicts of interest for the panel members as a result of previous involvement with the country under review. This led to panel members recusing themselves wholly or partially from the reviews on some occasions.

In order to institutionalise the ITAP's autonomy, we recommend that the guidance documentation to the Secretariat contain a specific instruction to respect and ensure the independence of the permanent ITAP, on lines similar to the manner in which perceived conflict of interest is addressed. This would ensure that the approach does not remain dependent on individuals.

On one occasion, a World Bank staff member contacted a panel member directly to clarify a point in the draft report for a country programme on which he was working.

The question was not a substantial point, but it did raise the risk that the independence of the panels could be called into question if World Bank staff (or indeed any other staff) are able to approach panel members outside of the ITAP process. We therefore recommend that the permanent ITAP guidelines contain a clear direction to the effect that members of country panels should not be contacted by anyone other than the relevant officials of the Secretariat.

Panel composition

The guidance on panel composition is clear and covers assessment of the specified requirements areas; as noted earlier, the ITAP membership pool brings together a diverse range of experts, each of whom brings to the table many years of experience and familiarity with global education and political systems. The Chair, who finally identifies and selects members for each of the panels, has full independence in doing so, and received unconditional support from the Secretariat during the process, thus making it possible to put together robust assessment panels.

From a diversity perspective, the membership pool is well balanced, with more female members than male, and significant representation from the global South although there is always scope to improve the latter to enable further participation. We expect that this will be addressed suitably during the establishment of the permanent ITAP and recommend that this spirit of diversity and representation be carefully preserved through periodic reviews of the membership.

It was observed that the number of panel members varied across the pilot countries – in some cases, there were four members including the Chair, in others five. During discussion with the Secretariat, a consensus view seemed to emerge that including the Chair, membership of most panels could be limited to four, with the possibility of adding one additional member in the case of larger countries or where translations are required.

The representation of some technical areas and languages could certainly be strengthened, with more members added to cover areas such as finance and education economics, and languages such as French and Spanish. In addition, while members selected for the pilot ITAP represented experience gained in government, development partners and NGOs, it might be useful to consider adding some with a more academic or research background, while retaining the ability to appreciate real-world issues of programme implementation and its challenges. We also recommend that the panels include representatives from partner countries, in particular senior or retired officials/ministers with experience of developing and delivering education sector plans and system reforms in developing countries, while ensuring adherence to conflict of interest guidelines.

Additionally, we recommend a system of rotation of selected members to ensure that more have the opportunity to participate in the deliberations of the ITAP, although this will need to be implemented in a manner that does not deprive the Chair or panel concerned of the necessary expertise.

In general, the Co-Chairs were able to choose freely from the ITAP pool which had a broad range of skills and experience. All panel members provided clear, concise inputs to the report on time, demonstrating a high level of skill in reviewing a large number of documents in a short period of time and then focusing on key gaps that were likely to have a significant impact on the efforts to improve the education outcomes in the countries under review. Most panel members took a pragmatic and common-sense approach to application of the review criteria, which allowed the panels to reach a consensus view without extensive debate. The reviews also benefitted from the fact that most, if not all, panel members had experience of participating in education sector processes in a number of different capacities and were therefore fully aware of the practical challenges of developing and delivering education sector plans in difficult circumstances.

Inputs to the panel

The inputs provided to support the country panels were high quality, comprehensive, and accessible. The country files included a range of materials to allow the panel to make their assessments. World Bank project documents were helpful, as were independent evaluation reports to complement government plans and policy statements. Some countries also included reports by NGOs and UN agencies on key issues such as gender equity and conflict responses, which were also valuable.

Overall, the process of providing inputs to each country panel has been sound and helpful. The Secretariat has provided the panels with the necessary documentation and where necessary, with supplementary information as requested. The detailed briefing provided by the GPE country team lead in the first kick-off meeting provides country context and addresses any initial questions raised by members. A major benefit of this briefing lies in helping the panel to cross-link various issues so that their analysis of the allocated requirements area remains cognizant of other related factors, resulting in a whole systems approach to the ITAP assessment.

The country self-assessment analyses were particularly helpful but were not always fully completed by the countries concerned; when fully completed, they made it easier for the panel to respond to the local education group self-assessment with a supporting or challenging statement instead of preparing an independent assessment based only on the supporting documents which might have been perceived as a 'top-down view' from outside experts. We observed some

inconsistencies in how the self-assessments were completed and understand that there were exchanges between the Secretariat and the local education group to ensure the quality and consistency of these assessments before they were submitted to the ITAP. We believe that this is a valuable contribution from the Secretariat.

A step that could further strengthen the deliberations of the panel (but is likely to add to the time it takes) would be interaction at the kick-off meeting with one or two selected country experts, perhaps from the other development partners or local NGOs, who might provide additional – and possibly divergent – perspectives. We recommend that this be considered as a means to provide an additional layer of verification of the information provided to the ITAP.

A recommendation made during the pilot related to the need for document files provided to the panels to be named consistently and to follow a specified naming convention. We commend the Secretariat for promptly implementing this suggestion, and for providing in addition, a numbered list of files with consistent file names to the panel (at the time of writing) for Uganda.

Finally, all members of the ITAP received an initial orientation and briefing from the Secretariat, including the importance of managing conflict of interest. However, in some cases, members were only selected to serve on a panel several months later, at which point a refresher of the orientation would have been useful. We suggest therefore, that if more than 3 months have elapsed since the initial orientation and the selection of a member for a country panel, they be provided with a quick reminder of basic principles.

Approach to draft assessment

Generally speaking, we found that the approach to producing the draft assessments has worked well, with members agreeing on their respective requirements areas at the kick-off meeting and seeking clarifications as necessary, either from the Chair or the Secretariat, in the meeting or subsequently. Reminding members of the ITAP Guidelines at the start of the panel process also ensured that outcomes from these panels remained consistent irrespective of their membership or Chair. The process of exchanging notes on the initial drafts was also helpful, with the discussion helping to identify and fill gaps, and enriching the overall quality of the report. Another aspect of this process lies in its value to the panel in helping members take a whole-systems approach, as opposed to individual members confining themselves to their area of expertise.

The Chair of each panel then produced a draft full report for comment by individual panel members. Based on their final comments, an initial version was shared with the Secretariat, who confined their responses to clarifications and/or correction of factual

errors. A previous practice of copy-editing to have these reports meet GPE style guidelines has also now been limited to formatting, correcting clear typos, and ensuring any GPE terminology is correctly referenced.

Local education group comments on draft reports have varied considerably from comprehensive and detailed comments from multiple members of the group to no comment at all. We therefore believe that it would be helpful to clarify to the local education group the level of response expected from them. In particular, we recommend that they be advised to limit themselves to correcting factual errors rather than questioning the ITAP's judgement, unless there is clearly an error of judgement due to lack of understanding of the local context. The local education group should also be made aware that responsibility for the final report to the GPE Board rests with the ITAP, even if the country panel may not always agree with views they have expressed.

Secretariat and WBG support

We have noted above the unconditional support provided by the Secretariat to the ITAP and commend them for their diligence. Clear and timely responses that respected the independence of each panel were received by the country panels, especially during the drafting process, thus enabling smooth and trouble-free completion of the panel's work. Requests for additional information were met promptly, with relevant documents sourced and provided at the earliest. On the operations side too, WBG support was forthcoming and timely, particularly in matters related to IT and setting up payment accounts.

We recommend that appropriate process documentation be put in place to guide those who may eventually succeed the current representatives of the Secretariat and to ensure that this level of support continues while respecting the autonomy of the permanent ITAP.

Conflict of interest

WBG has well established and robust systems for managing actual and perceived conflict of interest, with clear policies to guide panel members in each situation. An initial and detailed briefing was provided to the Co-Chairs by the GPE Ethics Officer, as well as to panel members in the first orientation session, and helped to deal with any subsequent questions that arose. Requiring ITAP members to sign a conflict-of-interest declaration form both at the time of their initial selection and update it each time they are requested to serve on a country panel ensures that this aspect is carefully considered by each member and consciously addressed to remove even the appearance of conflict. In addition, the Chair of each panel, with the support of the Secretariat, and the GPE Ethics Officer review these forms for any conflict of interest

before taking a final decision on the members who eventually serve on a panel.

On the whole, we believe that the Secretariat and WBG managed the conflict-of-interest issues reasonably well. It is important that the ITAP is seen to be fully independent and that panel members cannot be accused of having a bias as a result of previous work.

Practical considerations: transaction costs and timing of the panels

Initial Secretariat advice on striking a delicate balance between challenging and supporting the country level process was well received. Keeping in view the sensitivities attached to an external report of the kind produced by the ITAP, the ITAP has been careful to avoid giving the impression that its reports would lead to the imposition of additional requirements on the country. However, it will be interesting to receive feedback from the local education group and the GPE Board after they receive the first reports in order to judge what value, if any, has been added by this process.

Overall, we believe the process was managed quite efficiently. There may be some reduction in transaction costs by making four the default number of members for the country panels except in the case where there are gaps in skills or languages, as we have noted earlier. We are also of the view that some efficiencies have already been gained by streamlining and organising country files more clearly and logically, and by developing a consistent labelling convention for all files.

We note that the uncertainty around the timing of ITAP country panels did cause problems for some members although most were able to respond positively to the invitation to join a panel and were prepared to prioritise ITAP work over other work. This might pose more of a challenge for independent consultants who may be declining other work in the expectation of forthcoming ITAP reviews. Given the need to respect local processes emphasised by GPE, there may not necessarily be a solution to this uncertainty caused by changing circumstances at the country level. We believe that it remains important to allow time at the local level for a proper review of the enabling factors package submission documents by the local education group and the GPE Secretariat to ensure ownership and quality, even if this leads to occasional hiccups with the composition of panels.

Once the panel's initial report is submitted to the local education group though, there may be value in requiring the latter to respond within a definite timeframe failing which the ITAP report may be considered final, to ensure that panel members do not wait indefinitely for this feedback and the assessment can be provided to the GPE Board in time. This is as much to ensure that the process is completed expeditiously as to respect the time availability of members of the panel, many of whom would have other commitments; it may not be realistic to expect them to be available again at

short notice to deliberate upon country responses when they are eventually received.

We also believe that there is value to considering when the ITAP process should commence so that it fits most efficiently into the overall country planning process. In one of the countries assessed, an independent mid-term evaluation had just taken place, which addressed most of the questions expected to be answered by the ITAP. In such circumstances, it was a moot question if the ITAP assessment added further value.

Managing increased workflow

The pool of current ITAP panel members will definitely need to be widened depending upon the number of reviews each panel member can reasonably be expected to complete in a year. Completing 20-25 assessments annually will also need the appointment of two or more Co-Chairs as it would be difficult for any one person to chair all of them in addition to their other professional obligations. The appointment of Co-Chairs would also reduce the risk of relying on only one person for all the panels. Assuming a certain degree of overlap between the panels, the logistics of managing country files, draft reports, local education group responses, etc., will also be challenging and will certainly require at least one full-time GPE Secretariat staff member plus administrative support.