REVIEW OF COMPLETION REPORTS FOR GPE'S EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

(2019–2022)

GPE Transforming Education

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBA	cost-benefit analysis
EMIS	education management information system
ICR	Implementation Completion and Results Report
ICRR	Implementation Completion and Results Report Review
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
PCFC	partner country affected by fragility and conflict
VfM	value for money

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a review of the completion reports for GPE's education sector program implementation grants, GPE's largest financing instrument. The purpose of the review is twofold: accountability and lesson learning. The review helps GPE be accountable for the results achieved in closed grants. It also helps the partnership learn lessons from recently closed grants and informs the GPE Secretariat's engagement with country partners in future grant planning and implementation. It aims to understand the performance of closed grants, primarily along three dimensions: relevance, efficacy and efficiency. The review asked key research questions for each dimension:

- Relevance: Did the programs respond to the needs and priorities of the countries? How do the program objectives and activities align with the goals and priorities of GPE?

- Efficacy: To what extent were program objectives achieved? Can the achievements be attributed to the program activities?

- Efficiency: Were programs implemented in an efficient manner? Were funds used to achieve value for money (VfM)?

The review covers the 26 program completion reports submitted to the GPE Secretariat between 2019 and 2022. These programs were financed by 27 grants[1] approved between 2012 and 2019, of which 20 were approved prior to GPE 2020—GPE's strategic plan for 2016–20—and 7 were approved during GPE 2020. The programs represent a typical GPE portfolio in terms of the regional distribution, the share of fragile states and the breakdown of World Bank and non–World Bank programs. Most of the programs were not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since they closed before its outbreak in early 2020; five programs closed during the pandemic.

The review adapted the methodologies used for two similar reviews commissioned by the GPE Secretariat in 2019: one an examination of the key outcomes of closed grants,[2]

1. Two grants for Kenya (2015–19 and 2019–20) supported one program, which submitted one combined report.
2. Global Partnership for Education (GPE), "Review of Completion Reports for the Global Partnership for Education's Education Sector Program Implementation Grants: 2016–2018" (Washington, DC: GPE, 2019), https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2020-01-15-GPE-Review-of-Completion-Report-for-GPE-programs_0.pdf.

and the other an assessment of the VfM aspect of the closed grants.[3] The review was desk based and used not only the completion reports but also the program application documents as well as independent reviews of the completion reports, which are available for most programs for which the World Bank was the grant agent. The review did not involve interviews or questionnaires for country partners.

Because of the sources of documentation examined, this review mainly focuses on what the grants achieved, not necessarily on how they interfaced with the wider education system in the country, or interacted with other efforts led by the country or other donors. Two other technical issues also limited the review: (a) inconsistency in the report contents across grants and (b) absence of independently validated ratings for programs managed by grant agents other than the World Bank. Because of these limitations, some analyses included in this review were only possible for World Bank programs. For World Bank programs, independently validated ratings were used for analysis whenever available.

Timeliness of report submission remains as a challenge. More than half (14 out of 26, or 56 percent) of the reports were overdue, including 11 that were one month or more late. Comparing the completion report submission dates and the approval dates of subsequent grants in the same country, almost half of the new grants were approved before the completion reports of the previous grants were submitted to the GPE Secretariat, including four that had different grant agents. Even if all reports were submitted without delay, new grant preparation usually starts much earlier than the submission of completion reports for the previous grant, or even its closure. Therefore, there should be an agile mechanism for ensuring that the findings and lessons regarding the previous grants, which are ultimately recorded in the completion review, are available as the new grant is designed. Some lessons may be available in the implementation progress reports, but others may become available only once the process of completion review is initiated and information is gathered.

Performance of the Closed Grants

Relevance

All programs were aligned with their country's education sector plan. The programs continued to respond to the evolving needs and priorities of the country throughout the implementation, by restructuring the programs, reallocating funds, obtaining additional

3. Global Partnership for Education (GPE), "Review of Value for Money Analyses in Closed GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants" (Washington, DC: GPE, 2019), https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-10-07-gpe-review-of-value-for-money-analyses.pdf.

financing and extending the closing dates. For example, in Cameroon, in response to an influx of refugees, they used the funds available from savings in other components to provide school benches in schools hosting refugees.

Program objectives were found to be well aligned with GPE's continued goals of improving learning outcomes and promoting equity and inclusion, although some did not measure results at the outcome level. Learning was addressed by the largest number of programs (21 out of 26), followed by access, organizational capacity and inclusion. In the area of learning, all but one objective aimed to improve learning outcomes. However, less than half of the objectives had an indicator to measure progress in learning outcomes through learning assessments. Other program objectives used a proxy (for example, primary completion rates) or measured output-level results (for example, number of teachers trained) or intermediate outcome–level results (for example, increased competency of trained teachers) but did not measure improved learning outcomes for students in their results frameworks. In the area of access, half of the program objectives aimed to improve access specifically for disadvantaged populations or had a particular focus on girls.

Efficacy

Efficacy was assessed at three levels: at the level of program (by looking at overall efficacy ratings), at the level of individual program objectives (using ratings for individual program objectives available for World Bank programs) and at the level of indicators linked to the program objectives. A four-point rating system was used for the assessment: high (objectives fully achieved), substantial (objectives almost achieved), modest (objectives partly achieved) and negligible (objectives not achieved).

All programs almost or fully achieved their objectives. Of 26 programs, 22 (all 19 World Bank programs and 3 out of 7 non–World Bank programs) had an overall efficacy rating. Both the self-ratings and the independently validated ratings (available only for World Bank programs; the independent ratings are done by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group) were either high or substantial for all programs, indicating that, overall, the majority of the grant objectives were achieved. This represents a slight improvement from the review in 2019, which had 2 programs (out of 13) rated as modest.

At the level of specific program objectives, the performance was in the satisfactory range for most of the objectives. Out of 46 program objectives in 18 World Bank programs for which independently validated ratings were available, the performance was high or substantial for 82 percent (or 38 out of 46) of the objectives. However, the remaining 18 percent (or 8 objectives) were rated modest, 7 of which aimed to improve learning outcomes. The

program objectives were rated modest not only because of their low achievement status but also because of the issues related to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), particularly around data and measurement. These issues included the lack of comparable baseline data, the lack of appropriate indicator to monitor progress of outcome the robustness of the measurement methodology and shortcomings in the program results chain. In fact, completion reports and their reviews mention M&E not only as a reason for the modest rating but also as a factor that supported success for programs that achieved objectives. This review, too, found that a theory of change and a results framework—two critical tools to facilitate evidence-based planning and monitoring—are either absent from the program document or have some shortcomings, which makes it difficult to monitor the achievement of the key aspects of the program and/or attribute the program achievement to the interventions.

Analysis at the indicator level reveals that the level of achievement varied across different priority areas and by the level in the results chain. The 167 indicators measuring the achievement of 62 objectives that are included in the 26 programs have been categorized into three groups: fully/mostly achieved, partially achieved and not achieved. The proportion of indicators that were fully/mostly achieved ranged from 78 percent for inclusion to 63 percent for learning. In the area of learning, most of the indicators that were not achieved or for which data were not available aimed at measuring the improvement in learning outcomes, confirming the challenges in achieving the learning outcome targets discussed above. Assessment of the level of achievement of indicators at different levels in the results chain (that is, output, intermediate outcome and outcome) found that the proportion of indicators that achieved their targets was lowest for outcome and highest for output. It is assumed that the outcome-oriented indicators are harder to achieve because of external factors at play and the limited time covered in these programs. However, looking at indicators that measured learning outcomes, many programs extended more than two years but did not achieve the targets, suggesting other factors may be at play and should be explored further.

Efficiency

To examine the efficiency of programs reported at completion, the review looked at three aspects of a program in the completion reports: the overall efficiency rating, the economic analysis of cost-effective use of project resources based on a cost-benefit and/or unit cost of inputs analysis, and efficiency in project implementation or implementation efficiency.

Overall program efficiency or VfM was low as indicated by the efficiency rating in the independent review of completion reports (available only for World Bank programs). Of the 18 programs, 1 (6 percent) was rated high, 7 (39 percent) were rated substantial, and

more than half (10, or 56 percent) were rated modest in efficiency. The rating takes into account (a) the evidence of cost-effectiveness based on an economic analysis and (b) a discussion on the extent of efficient use of resources during project implementation. Implementation inefficiency seems to be the primary reason for low efficiency ratings, as it was noted in every case where efficiency was rated modest. The reasons for high efficiency rating included not only implementation efficiency but also the use of cost-effective interventions based on evidence.

The extent to which cost-effectiveness was examined using a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) or unit costs in an economic analysis in a completion report was limited, although higher than that in the VfM review in 2019.[4] About half of the completion reports report a CBA, about half report unit cost for at least one key input, such as textbook procurement and classroom construction, and about a third report both CBA and unit costs. Disaggregating by grant agent, CBA and unit cost discussions are most common when the grant agent is the World Bank. In all cases of CBA, the internal rate of return is higher than the discount rate, and the project is therefore considered cost-effective. Similarly, in unit cost analyses, costs tend to be lower than the comparator costs, suggesting that the use of input is cost-effective. Lower unit costs are due to factors such as economies of scale in procuring inputs, more efficient procurement practices, cost savings in implementation and using alternative models of classroom construction. However, this review argues that these approaches to examine VfM are limited, particularly using a CBA, which tends to be based on a number of assumptions. In light of the analysis on efficacy, which shows that learning gains during project duration tend to be modest, a closer look at the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the types of interventions chosen, along with the country context, is clearly warranted to improve value for money.

There appears to be significant inefficiencies in program implementation. Almost all programs extended their closing dates and the average extension period was 18 months. Consistent with findings from a previous analysis conducted for GPE's *Grant Performance Report 2019*,[5] the programs that experienced delays in the early stages of implementation tended to extend for a long period—more than 18 months for the programs included in this review. Procurement-related challenges and program management challenges were the main drivers of implementation delays. More than 70 percent of all completion reports suggested what could have been done to make implementation smoother. These include factors such as greater flexibility to adapt to context and evolving changes, a realistic timeline or more time for implementation, the inclusion of a pre-implementation phase and setting realistic targets, and/or more institutional capacity building.

4. GPE, "Review of Value for Money Analyses in Closed GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants.
5. Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Grant Performance Report 2019 (Washington, DC: GPE, 2019), https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/2019-grant-performance-report.

All the completion reports mention at least one challenge leading to procurement delay, although the challenge seemed to differ depending on the grant agent and their procurement practice. The most frequent challenge for World Bank programs, which typically procure goods and services through the partner country government, was capacity constraint, such as lack of procurement staff or staff with good technical and administrative knowledge and bandwidth. A common redress measure in these cases was capacity building by hiring procurement staff with adequate expertise and/or providing needed training. For non–World Bank programs, particularly when procurement is done directly by the grant agent, political instability and/or conflict is slightly more frequent relative to capacity constraint.

Lessons Learned and Potential Areas for Action

- Several evidence from this review point to the challenges of achieving and/or measuring learning outcome objectives. All objectives that were rated Modest aimed to improve learning outcomes, except one. When looking at the level of achievement of indicators at the program objective level, learning was the area of least achievement. The level of achievement of learning outcome indicators was low compared to outcome level indicators in other areas (e.g., access). The modest achievement of learning objectives was either because they fell short of the target, or there were data and measurement issues that made it difficult to attribute improvements in learning outcomes to program interventions or to determine whether there was sufficient achievement. While it is necessary to ensure a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism (see next bullet point), it is also critical to better understand key aspects of the programs that met learning outcome targets and those that did not. Analysis could include an assessment of the interventions used to achieve improved learning outcomes, the evidence base used to design the interventions, and a comparison of the level of ambition in setting learning targets. Such analysis will help identify potential changes to be made to GPE's grant instruments and operating model to facilitate country partners' efforts to improve learning outcomes.

- The findings confirm that M&E is fundamental for measuring the success of any program. The Secretariat may need to consider identifying key facets of good M&E design and establishing more robust standards for assessing M&E aspects in program documents, including but not limited to the availability and quality of the results framework and theory of change, to help partner countries identify appropriate measurements, indicators and targets.

- It is important to ensure that lessons learned from a closed grant are used in the design of a subsequent grant in the same country, particularly to prevent the same implementation challenges (for example, procurement). As the completion report of the closed grant may not be available when country partners prepare for a new grant, there should be other learning opportunities available in the early stage of new grant preparation. These opportunities should be embedded in the processes leading to programming of a new grant.

- Evidence suggests that delays in the early stages of program implementation are a warning sign of a significantly extended program period, but most grant agents do not immediately request a revision because they still have time to complete the activities. When programs face delays in the early stages (for example, because of external factors or a delayed start of program implementation), there needs to be a realistic risk assessment and effective course-correction measures. The Secretariat may consider introducing tools to enable agile and proactive monitoring to support grant agents in this regard.

- Procurement was and has always been the biggest bottleneck in implementation. The findings suggest that a realistic assessment of a country's procurement capacity is key for preventing procurement-related delay, particularly when procurement is done by the partner country government. Closed grants facing procurement problems typically provided capacity building support to overcome delays, suggesting the need for a more rigorous assessment of procurement capacity and arrangement in the preparation stage. The Secretariat may also consider procurement challenges in the closed grant in the same country when assessing the application document. Alternatively, the most efficient way of procuring goods and services in the country may be sought, while investing in enhancement in procurement capacity in the long term.

- Flexibilities allowed to grant agents to revise original program design—by extending the program implementation period, reallocating the budget and revising the indicators and targets as appropriate—enabled them to adapt the program to address evolving situation in the country and respond to the emergencies. This points to greater flexibility, longer implementation period and realistic target setting as key for successful and timely implementation. The Secretariat may consider conducting further analysis on the effectiveness of program revision and appropriateness of standard program duration (four years) to help realize system transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

GPE is a multi-stakeholder partnership and a fund dedicated to improving education in lower-income countries. The education sector program implementation grant is GPE's largest grant instrument. The grant provides funding to country governments, through a grant agent, to contribute to the implementation of key areas of their national education sector plans and system transformation.

In 2019, the GPE Secretariat commissioned two reviews on closed implementation grants. The first one looked at the completion reports of 30 grant-funded programs completed between 2016 and 2018.[6] The review examined the key outcomes in GPE 2020 strategic goals, namely, equity, learning and education systems. It also looked at lessons from across the programs, to improve future planning, design and implementation of grants and GPE strategy. The second review assessed the value for money (VfM) approaches embedded in implementation grants, based on a desk review of documents from the grants that closed between 2016 and 2018.[7] The review assessed whether, how and to what extent VfM analyses are incorporated in the grant documents and looked at what information these analyses yield about a project's effectiveness and efficiency.

As GPE rolls out the GPE 2025 operating model, now is an opportune time to update the findings from the 2019 review, examining the 26 completion reports submitted since the previous review.

Purpose and Objectives

The main purpose of this review is twofold: accountability and learning. First, the review aims to offer insights into the performance of the closed implementation grants based on information available in completion reports and other relevant documents. This helps ensure accountability for and transparency on the performance and the results of the closed grants to GPE's stakeholders. Second, the review seeks to help the partnership learn lessons from recently closed grants and inform the Secretariat's engagement with country partners in future grant planning and implementation, including through relevant policies and procedures that it sets out for country partners. Therefore, although the target

6. GPE, "Review of Completion Reports for the Global Partnership for Education's Education Sector Program Implementation Grants: 2016–2018."
7. GPE, "Review of Value for Money Analyses in Closed GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants."

audience of this review is the entire partnership, chapter 7 ("Lessons Learned and Potential Areas for Action") is mainly geared toward the Secretariat, particularly around how it can better support country partners in the education sector program implementation grant preparation and implementation.

This review aims to synthesize evidence available in completion reports and other relevant documents to examine grant performance in three areas: relevance, efficacy and efficiency.[8] In other words, it assesses whether the programs' objectives were relevant in country context and vis-à-vis GPE's goals, to what extent these objectives were achieved and whether they were achieved in an efficient manner.

Scope of the Review and Data Sources

This review covers all completion reports for implementation grants submitted to the GPE Secretariat after the completion report review in 2019 and before the data cutoff for this review, which was the end of December 2022. In this period,[9] 26 completion reports were submitted for 26 programs or projects (hereinafter referred to as "programs") supported by 27 implementation grants (table 1).[10] Of 27 grants, 20 were approved before GPE 2020 (years of approval: 2012–14), and 7 were approved during GPE 2020 (years of approval: 2015–19). Of 26 programs, 21 were closed before the COVID-19 pandemic and 5 were closed during the pandemic. The review excludes the 6 accelerated funding grants that submitted completion reports during the same period, as they serve a different purpose (that is, emergency response) than the implementation grants.

The programs included in this review are aligned with the typical portfolio of GPE in recent years. Fifty-four percent (14 out of 26) of the programs were in countries affected by fragility and conflict. Of 26 programs, 16 (or 62 percent) were in low-income countries, 9 (or 35 percent) were in lower-middle-income countries and 1 was a regional grant for four Caribbean upper-middle-income countries.[11] The World Bank was the grant agent for 19 programs, or 73 percent of the programs. UNICEF (n=5), DFID (n=1) and Sida (n=1) also served as grant agents.[12]

8. These are three of the six evaluation criteria defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC); the other three criteria are impact, coherence and sustainability. OECD, "Evaluation Criteria," https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm. This review does not look at impact, coherence and sustainability, mainly because of the unavailability of evidence in the documents included for this review.
9. December 2019 through December 2022.
10. Two grants for Kenya supported one World Bank program; therefore, there is only one Implementation Completion and Results Report (ICR) for these two grants.
11. Kenya was categorized as low income for the first grant (2015–20) and lower middle income for the second grant (2020–22). For the purpose of this analysis, it was counted toward low income.
12. DFID=Department of International Development (of the United Kingdom), now merged with Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Sida = Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

The review intends to synthesize the information included in completion reports as well as related documents, including program documents and progress reports. For grants managed by the World Bank as grant agent, the Implementation Completion and Results Report Review (ICRR), which is an independent review of self-evaluated completion reports, was also included as a source of information.[13]

Table 1. Grants included in this review

	COUNTRY	GRANT AGENT	FUNDING MODALITY	GPE PCFC	INCOME LEVEL	GRANT APPROVAL DATE	ACTUAL GRANT START DATE	ACTUAL GRANT CLOSING DATE	GRANT AMOUNT (US$)
1	Burundi	UNICEF	Standalone	Yes	LIC	06/16/2016	06/16/2016	06/21/2019	20,100,000
2	Cameroon	WB	Standalone	No	LMIC	11/19/2013	03/11/2014	06/30/2019	50,761,884
3	Caribbean	WB	Standalone	No	N/A	06/16/2016	07/27/2016	09/30/2019	1,775,557
4	Central African Republic	UNICEF	Standalone	Yes	LIC	12/16/2014	12/17/2014	07/31/2018	15,510,000
5	Eritrea	UNICEF	Standalone	Yes	LIC	11/19/2013	03/28/2014	12/31/2019	25,300,000
6	Ethiopia[a]	WB	Sector pooled	Yes	LIC	11/19/2013	05/09/2014	02/16/2018	100,000,000
7	Ethiopia[a]	WB	Sector pooled	Yes	LIC	12/02/2016	07/18/2017	12/31/2019	100,000,000
8	Gambia, The	WB	Project pooled	Yes	LIC	11/19/2013	04/09/2014	08/31/2018	6,897,233
9	Guinea	WB	Project pooled	No	LIC	12/16/2014	07/21/2015	08/31/2019	37,650,510
10	Kenya[b]	WB	Standalone	No	LIC	12/16/2014	06/04/2015	03/31/2020	88,400,000
11	Kenya[b]	WB	Standalone	No	LMIC	10/22/2019	01/24/2020	01/24/2022	9,700,000
12	Lao PDR	WB	Project pooled	No	LMIC	12/16/2014	06/04/2015	12/31/2021	16,800,000
13	Malawi	WB	Standalone	No	LIC	06/16/2016	12/13/2016	07/30/2021	44,900,000
14	Mauritania	WB	Standalone	No	LMIC	05/21/2013	02/18/2014	11/30/2018	12,000,897
15	Mozambique	WB	Sector pooled	No	LIC	05/23/2015	09/16/2015	06/30/2019	55,870,000
16	Nepal[c]	WB	Sector pooled	Yes	LIC	05/23/2015	01/22/2016	07/15/2019	59,300,000
17	Niger	WB	Project pooled	No	LIC	11/19/2013	07/19/2014	06/30/2019	80,046,125
18	Nigeria	WB	Standalone	Yes	LMIC	12/15/2014	05/22/2015	06/29/2020	100,000,000
19	Pakistan (Balochistan)	WB	Standalone	Yes	LMIC	06/28/2014	03/25/2015	09/30/2019	34,000,000
20	South Sudan	UNICEF	Standalone	Yes	LIC	11/20/2012	01/01/2013	05/30/2018	35,981,617

13. The World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) conducts a desk review (called an Implementation Completion and Results Report Review, or ICRR) of the evidence provided in the completion report to validate the findings.

	COUNTRY	GRANT AGENT	FUNDING MODALITY	GPE PCFC	INCOME LEVEL	GRANT APPROVAL DATE	ACTUAL GRANT START DATE	ACTUAL GRANT CLOSING DATE	GRANT AMOUNT (US$)
21	Sudan	WB	Project pooled	Yes	LMIC	11/20/2012	04/11/2013	02/15/2019	76,472,764
22	Tanzania (Mainland)	Sida	Standalone	No	LIC	11/19/2013	07/01/2014	06/30/2019	92,917,597
23	Togo	WB	Standalone	Yes	LIC	06/28/2014	03/05/2015	09/30/2019	27,800,000
24	Uganda	WB	Standalone	Yes	LIC	11/19/2013	08/19/2014	03/31/2020	100,000,000
25	Uzbekistan	WB	Standalone	No	LMIC	06/28/2014	10/29/2014	12/31/2019	49,338,583
26	Yemen, Rep.	UNICEF	Standalone	Yes	LMIC	05/21/2013	03/28/2014	06/30/2022	72,600,000
27	Zambia	DFID	Sector pooled	No	LMIC	05/21/2013	11/15/2013	03/15/2019	20,467,972

Note: DFID=Department of International Development (UK); LIC = low-income country; LMIC = lower-middle-income country; PCFC = partner countries affected by fragility and conflict; Sida = Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; WB = World Bank.
a. One completion report was submitted for grants 6 and 7. There is a separate completion report for the variable part of grant 7 worth $30 million, which was approved after the approval of the fixed part.
b. One completion report was submitted for grants 10 and 11.
c. The completion report covers the fixed part only, which constitutes 70 percent of the grant amount.

Methodology

The findings presented in this report derive primarily from the review team's in-depth review of 26 completion reports and other relevant documents. The review involved two types of coding and analysis. First, the program documents were coded and costed to understand the programs' support to the eight priority areas under GPE 2025, using the GPE 2025 coding framework[14] and methodology.[15] Second, the completion reports and ICRRs (for World Bank grants) were coded to examine the relevance, efficacy and efficiency of the grants, using a framework developed for this review that was based on OECD DAC evaluation criteria[16] and the previous review conducted in 2019.

The review was conducted internally in the Secretariat. The team was composed of five members: one staff from the Secretariat's Results and Performance Team, three consultants for coding and one consultant for the analysis and writing of the chapter on efficiency. The coding exercises were done by three trained coders, which was followed by a consistency check by staff.

14. Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Codebook GPE 2025 (Washington, DC: GPE, 2022), https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/codebook-gpe-grants.
15. Note that the programs reviewed were approved during and before GPE 2020. See "Scope of the Review and Data Sources."
16. OECD DAC, "Evaluation Criteria," https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm.

Limitations

The main limitation of this review was that its scope was limited to what the grants achieved, not necessarily on how the grants interfaced with country systems or interacted with other country- or donor-led efforts. This is due to the sources of documentation examined by this review (see "Scope of the Review and Data Sources" and "Methodology" above).

Two other more technical issues limited the review: (a) inconsistency in the information included in the reports, particularly between World Bank and non-World Bank reports, and (b) lack of independently verified ratings for non–World Bank programs. As such, some analyses in this review are limited to World Bank grants.

The inconsistency in the information included in the reports is due to the fact that the review covers grants that predate the launch of GPE's standardized reporting templates in 2022. Prior to the launch of these templates, the Secretariat provided guidance on completion reports, but the grant agents only used it on a voluntary basis. Most grant agents used their own templates to develop reports, which resulted in variation in the information included in the reports. The World Bank's completion reports, which constitute 73 percent (19 out of 26) of the reports included in this review, follow the same structure specified in its guideline. Table 2 shows availability of ratings included in the reports.

Table 2. Availability of ratings in the reports

DIMENSIONS	NUMBER OF REPORTS WITH RATINGS		
	World Bank grants (*n*=19)		Non–World Bank grants[1] (*n*=7)
	Rating by task team	IEG rating	Self
Relevance	18	18	2 (+ narrative available in some reports)
Overall efficacy	19	17	3 (+ narrative available in all reports)
Efficacy of each objective/ component	18	18	1 (+ narrative available in all reports)
Efficiency	18	18	1 (narrative available for a few grants)
Monitoring and evaluation	18	18	0 (narrative available for some grants)

Note: Among the World Bank reports, the Caribbean regional program ($1.8 million) did not include all the ratings, nor did it have a completion report review by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). Among the non–World Bank programs, Yemen submitted a completion report using the standardized template. Therefore, information is available for most dimensions above.

While all ratings included in World Bank reports have been independently validated by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) except for a few programs, for non–World Bank programs, objective assessments of self-ratings provided by grant agents are not available, although some included results of externally conducted end-line surveys in the report. As shown in table 3, there is a variation between the self-ratings by the task teams and the independently validated ratings by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). The difference between these ratings varies across dimensions, from 5 percent (for overall efficacy) to 39 percent (for efficacy ratings for each objective). This confirms the importance of objectively verifying ratings in the Secretariat and doing consistency checks across the portfolio, not only for the completion reports but also for the progress reports, for results framework reporting purpose. Because IEG's ratings are independently and systematically validated, this review used IEG's ratings for the analysis.

Table 3. Discrepancy between task teams' self-ratings and IEG's ratings, for World Bank programs

RATINGS USED FOR THIS REVIEW	NUMBER / PROPORTION OF TASK TEAM'S SELF-RATINGS THAT IEG DISAGREED	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS WITH RATINGS REVISED UP OR DOWN BY IEG
Relevance	11% (2/18)	Up: 1 Down: 1
Overall efficacy	6% (1/17)	Down: 1
Efficacy of each objective	39% (18/46)	Up: 2 Down: 16
Efficiency	33% (6/18)	Up: 1 Down: 5
M&E	29% (5/17)	Up: 3 Down: 2
Total	19% (14/72)	Up: 5 Down: 9

Note: Among the World Bank reports, the Caribbean regional program ($1.8 million) did not include all the ratings, nor did it have a completion report review by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). Among the non–World Bank programs, Yemen submitted a completion report using the standardized template. Therefore, information is available for most dimensions above.

2. TIMELINESS AND THE QUALITY OF COMPLETION REPORTS

Timeliness of Report Submission

More than half (14 out of 26 reports, 54 percent) of the reports in this review were overdue. Grant agents are supposed to submit a completion report to the GPE Secretariat within six months after the program closes.[17] (Three additional overdue grants were not included in this review because the Secretariat did not receive them before the data cutoff).[18] For the 17 overdue reports, the average time overdue was 2.39 months, with a variation of less than a month overdue to 7.4 months overdue (figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of reports overdue, by months overdue



Note: Less than a month overdue: Eritrea (UNICEF), Ethiopia (World Bank), Mauritania (World Bank), Niger (World Bank), South Sudan (UNICEF) and Togo (World Bank). A month overdue: Nepal (World Bank), Nigeria (World Bank), Senegal (World Bank) and Sudan (World Bank). Two months overdue: Lao PDR (World Bank) and Malawi (World Bank). Three months overdue: Cameroon (World Bank) and Tanzania (Mainland) (Sida). Six months overdue: Lesotho (World Bank) and Zambia (DFID). Seven months overdue: Central African Republic (UNICEF).

17. Grants that are part of larger program can submit a completion report within six months after the closing of the parent program.
18. The three grants were from Lesotho, Nepal and Senegal. The Lesotho grant closed on February 28, 2022, and the completion report was submitted on March 14, 2023. The Nepal grant closed on July 16, 2022, and the completion report was submitted on March 14, 2023. For Senegal, the GPE-funded portion of the program closed on May 31, 2018, and the parent program closed June 30, 2022; the completion report for the parent program was received on January 31, 2023. The data cutoff for this review was December 31, 2022.

One of the purposes of a completion report is to provide lessons learned from grant implementation that can be used to improve the relevance, efficacy, efficiency and sustainability of future programs in a systematic manner. Lessons learned from a closed grant are particularly useful for future GPE support in the same country. Comparing completion report submission dates and the approval dates for subsequent grants in the same country (see annex 1), of 28 closed grants that were followed by another grant in the same country,[19] 13 of the subsequent grants were approved before the completion report of the previous grant was submitted to the Secretariat. Of these 13 grants, 4 grants had a different grant agent than the previous grant, which makes it harder to build the new grant on lessons learned from the previous grant. Although lessons learned discussed in the completion report of the closed grant would have been useful in the design of the new grant in the same country, particularly to prevent the same implementation challenges from occurring in the new grant, because of GPE's funding cycle, for most cases the completion report would not be available when country partners prepare for the new grant. Therefore, there must be an alternative way to systematically use lessons learned from the previous grant in the design of the new grant.

Quality of the Reports

Of the 26 reports included in this review, 19 were World Bank programs; the completion report of these programs is known as an Implementation Completion and Results Report (ICR). The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank performed an independent review—an Implementation Completion and Results Report Review (ICRR)—on 18 ICRs. The IEG uses a four-point scale rating on the quality of an ICR. The ratings are based on the quality of evidence, quality of analysis, extent to which lessons are based on evidence and analysis, results orientation, internal consistency, consistency with guidelines and conciseness. Of the 18 ICRs, 4 were rated high, 12 substantial and 2 modest. The independent reviews note challenges in various areas for the programs rated modest and substantial:

- *Challenges related to the theory of change or results chain* — Several ICRRs note challenges in terms of quality of results chain. They point out the lack of indicators or need for better mapping of indicators, to clarify the links between the inputs, outputs and outcomes. The ICRRs noted that these challenges are rooted in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design of the programs rather than the quality of the reports.

19. For this comparison, we included grants omitted from this review because their completion reports were not submitted before the data cutoff. Uganda was included in this review, but there has not been a grant in the country since the closure of this grant.

- *Quality and completeness of the evidence* — Some reports lacked necessary evidence or data to fully assess the programs' achievements or their contribution to the improvements at the outcome level.

- *Lessons learned* — While most of the lessons learned were found to be useful, some ICRRs point to the room for improvement. For example, the reports could have provided more information on how the project team overcame challenges in implementing the project or the impact of the project on beneficiaries.

A comprehensive and systematic assessment of quality of all reports would have been possible if we could apply World Bank's assessment criteria for non–World Bank reports. However, it was challenging to do so because of time constraints and the extensive nature of the World Bank's assessment criteria. Therefore, we focused our assessment on the theory of change and results framework—two critical tools that facilitate evidence-based planning and monitoring—in the completion reports and program documents and include a short section on M&E at the end of this report.

3. RELEVANCE

Relevance is about the extent to which the programs responded to the needs and priorities of the sector, country partners and the beneficiaries, and the priorities of GPE, and continue to do so throughout the implementation period. This chapter synthesizes the information related to relevance in the completion reports and their reviews, not only to understand the overall relevance of the programs reviewed but also to examine their alignment to the GPE priorities as stipulated in its strategy.

Alignment to Countries' Priorities

According to the completion reports, all programs included in this review are aligned with each country's education sector plan. Most completion reports state that the program objectives were consistent with the goals and priorities stipulated in the education sector plan. They also show that revision of program design, including reallocation of the funds, provision of additional financing and extension of closing date, made it possible to respond to evolving needs and emergencies in the country. For example, in Cameroon, in the context of an influx of refugee children to the country, the government requested to use the funds that were available from savings in other components to provide school

benches in schools hosting refugees. By the end of the program, 6,131 benches had been distributed in refugee/displaced-affected communes, exceeding the planned 4,000 benches. For further discussion on fund reallocation and extension, see "Utilization of Grant Funds" and "Timeliness of Implementation" in chapter 3.

Alignment to GPE's Goals and Priority Areas

In order to understand thematic areas addressed by the program objectives, the program objectives have been mapped to eight priority areas under GPE 2025: access; learning; gender equality; inclusion; early learning; teaching and teachers; volume, equity and efficiency of domestic finance; and strong organizational capacity. Although the programs reviewed were all approved prior to GPE 2025, GPE 2025 priority areas were used as a framework for this analysis because they are sufficiently broad and cover the aspects that were the goals and priorities for GPE in GPE 2020 and before (for example, learning, gender equality, equity and inclusion).[20] This section particularly focuses on the program objectives and their alignment to GPE's priority areas.

For the 26 programs reviewed, there were 63 objectives in total. Learning was the priority area addressed by the largest number of objectives, followed by access, organizational capacity and inclusion (table 4). In the area of learning, all objectives but one aimed for improvement in learning outcome.[21] However, less than half of these objectives had an indicator on improved learning outcome measured through learning assessment (see box 1). In the area of access, 11 out of 22 objectives aimed for improving access specifically for disadvantaged populations or with particular attention to girls. In the area of organizational capacity, objectives were typically to strengthen education management information system (EMIS) capacity, improve school performance and strengthen capacity of education administration.

20. The goals of GPE 2020 were (a) improved and more equitable learning outcomes and (b) increased equity, gender equality and inclusion.
21. Including those that have improved learning outcomes as a higher-level objective.

Table 4. Number of program objectives addressing GPE 2025 priority areas (*N*=63) within the programs (*N*=26)

	ACCESS	LEARNING	GENDER EQUALITY	INCLUSION	EARLY LEARNING	TEACHING	DOMESTIC FINANCE	ORG. CAPACITY
Number of objectives addressing each priority area	22	26	8	21	3	12	1	21
% of objectives addressing each priority area	34%	41%	13%	33%	5%	19%	2%	33%
Number of programs addressing each priority area	16	21	7	13	3	10	1	14
% of programs addressing each area	62%	81%	27%	50%	12%	38%	4%	54%

Note: Among the World Bank reports, the Caribbean regional program ($1.8 million) did not include all the ratings, nor did it have a completion report review by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). Among the non–World Bank programs, Yemen submitted a completion report using the standardized template. Therefore, information is available for most dimensions above.

Box 1. Measurement of learning objectives

Of 63 objectives included in 26 programs reviewed, 26 objectives in 21 programs aimed for improving students' learning.[a] Of these 26 objectives, 12 measured progress in learning through learning assessments and 2 measured progress in learning through proxy (completion rate). The remaining 12 learning-related objectives did not include an indicator in the results framework to measure progress in learning; they measured outputs (for example, number of teachers trained, number of textbooks distributed, learning assessment system developed) or intermediate outcome indicators (for example, pupil to qualified teacher ratio, reduction in pupil-textbook ratio, learning assessment implemented) but not their effect on students' learning outcomes in their results frameworks, although some showed evidence of improved learning outcome in their completion reports.

The reason for not measuring learning outcomes was unclear in the available documents for most of the cases where proxy was used and where they did not measure learning outcome at all. However, one program pointed to the lack of standardized learning assessment as a challenge in the country in its program document, and another program mentioned that the program period was too short to improve learning outcome. Of 14 programs with learning objectives that were not measured by learning assessments, GPE programs supported the development of learning assessment systems in nine countries. Of those that did not measure learning outcomes, three had leading indicators of improved learning, such as improvements in pedagogical practice or greater use of formative assessments.

a. This includes programs that aimed for improving learning outcomes as a higher-level objective. In those cases,

program objectives are stipulated as improving quality, or learning conditions. The most common objective statement is to improve the quality of education (service delivery) or teaching and learning (environment/conditions) in the country or in selected areas and/or in early grades/basic education. Fewer programs specifically state improving learning outcome (for example, improve literacy and/or early grade mathematics) as program objectives.

In the area of equity and inclusion, the inequalities that most objectives aimed to address are related to geographic areas or socioeconomic status. The inequalities addressed in most programs are related to access to education, not in learning outcome. Typically, the programs selected target areas based on some indices and provide interventions to those areas. This is not to say that other dimensions of inequality (for example, disability, refugees and internally displaced persons) were not supported by the programs. In fact, according to the grant coding data, which analyze program documents at the subcomponent level, of 26 programs reviewed, 12 included interventions to support children with disabilities, 3 to support internally displaced persons and 1 to support refugees.

Eight objectives in 7 programs were specifically aimed for improving gender equality. Most of these programs addressed gender inequality as a part of wider inequalities, and three objectives in 2 programs (Pakistan (Balochistan) and Nigeria) specifically focused on girls (see box 2). The eight objectives that aimed for improving gender equality were to address inequalities in access, not in learning outcome. Although only 8 programs set improvement in gender equality as the program objective, this does not mean that gender equality was not addressed in the programs. Of 26 programs reviewed, 21 had some interventions related to gender equality, albeit without specific and measurable objectives.

Box 2. Program objectives related to gender equality

Program objectives related to gender equality can be sorted into two categories: those that address gender equality as a part of wider inequalities, and those that specifically focus on inequalities facing girls. Examples of program objectives in the two categories are below. Achievement status of these objectives were measured in part using sex-disaggregated data and a gender parity index.

1. Address gender equality as a part of wider inequalities
   - Promote equitable access to lower secondary education (Mauritania)
   - Strengthen access and equity in primary schools, particularly in deprived prefectures (Togo)
   - Improve access to schooling at basic education level (Niger)
   - Support the government to improve the equity in access and the learning environment of basic education in 13 governorates, and strengthen institutional capacity (Yemen).

2. Focus specifically on inequalities facing girls
   - Improve access to basic education in selected states, with attention to girls' participation (Nigeria)
   - Increase school enrollment and retention in project supported schools, with a special focus on girls (Pakistan (Balochistan))

Interventions to achieve these objectives included school construction, provision of transport services for girls and female teachers, awareness-raising campaigns, incentives to attend/graduate schools for girls, teacher training on girls' rights to education and provision of scholarships for female pre-service teachers.

4. EFFICACY

Efficacy is defined as the extent to which the program's objectives were achieved, and that achievement is attributable to the activities or actions supported by the programs. In this chapter, we look at programs' achievement status from three levels: (1) the overall efficacy rating, which aggregates achievement status of several program objectives for each program; (2) achievement status of each program objective; and (3) achievement status of indicators that are meant to measure the status of the program objectives.

Overall Efficacy of Closed Programs

Of the 26 completion reports, 22 (19 World Bank and 3 non–World Bank grants)[22] give an overall efficacy rating, which assesses the level of the achievement of the program's objectives and the directness of demonstrated connections between the program activities and the achievements reported.[23] Efficacy is rated on a four-point scale (high, substantial, modest and negligible), both in GPE's standardized completion reporting templates and the World Bank's Implementation Completion and Result Reports (ICRs).[24] For World Bank grants, in addition to self-evaluated efficacy ratings by the task teams,

22. Overall efficacy ratings for the Central African Republic (UNICEF), Eritrea (UNICEF), Tanzania (Mainland) (Sida) and Zambia (DFID) were not available in the completion reports.
23. World Bank, *Bank Guidance, Implementation Completion and Results Report (ICR) for Investment Project Financing (IPF) Operations* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020).
24. Prior to the launch of GPE 2025 in 2021, GPE only had a guideline for standardized reporting, which was used by grant agents on a voluntary basis for grants approved before GPE 2025. After the lunch of GPE 2025, GPE provided a standardized reporting template with which to submit grant completion reports.

objectively validated efficacy ratings by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) are available for all but one program.[25]

All 22 programs with an overall efficacy rating fully or almost achieved their objectives: 1 is rated high and 21 are rated substantial.[26] For the 18 World Bank programs reviewed by IEG, the efficacy rating in the Implementation Completion and Results Report Review (ICRR) is substantial for all but one grant, which was missing an overall efficacy rating in its ICRR.[27] This is a slight improvement from the completion report review in 2019, which found that overall efficacy was modest for 2 programs (out of 13 programs with independently validated ratings available).[28]

Achievement at the Level of Individual Objectives That Constitute Overall Objective

Overall efficacy is assessed based on the level of achievement of various objectives. Programs included in this review had two to five objectives each. When the levels of achievement of objectives are different (for example, one substantial and the other modest), the World Bank's guidance is to round up or down to come up with the overall efficacy rating.[29] Thus, even though overall efficacy is rated substantial for all programs with an objectively validated rating available, at the level of individual objectives some programs may not have achieved their targets. This section looks at achievement of individual objectives for World Bank programs that provided a rating for each objective. As ratings by the task teams in ICRs and those by IEG in ICRRs often differ, ratings in ICRRs were used for this analysis. Eighteen World Bank programs have an ICRR available.

Of 46 objectives included in these 18 World Bank programs, 6 were rated high, 32 were rated substantial and 8 were rated modest.[30] Of the 8 objectives rated modest, 7 objectives were aimed at improving learning outcomes, mostly for early grade children, with a few exceptions for adult learners and teacher trainees. Three objectives were rated modest because the results of the learning assessment fell short of the targets (Kenya, Mauritania

25. The Caribbean states program is missing the ICRR.
26. The overall efficacy rating for the South Sudan program (grant agent UNICEF) is moderately satisfactory, which is a rating usually used to assess the status of a program during implementation, not at completion. However, moderately satisfactory can be equated to substantial (the second best rating in the four-point completion rating scale), as it is the third best rating in the six-point implementation rating scale.
27. The efficacy rating for the Pakistan (Balochistan) program is rated high in the completion report, but IEG downgraded it, rating the program substantial. The ICRR for Nepal program does not provide an overall efficacy rating. This program had two objectives, one of which IEG rated high and the other modest.
28. Of the 13, 2 were rated high, 9 were rated substantial and 2 were rated modest.
29. Independent Evaluation Group, *Bank Guidance Implementation Completion and Results Report for Investment Project Financing Operations* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020).
30. Notably, 47 percent (or 18 out of 48) of the objectives rated high or substantial did not measure results at the outcome level.

and Nigeria). Four objectives were rated modest because of issues in measurement of progress in learning outcome (Cameroon, Guinea, Nepal and Uganda), such as lack of indicator, comparable baseline value or robust evidence on improved learning outcome. The remaining one objective that was rated modest ("to improve equity of education") received this rating because the program (Mozambique) did not include targeted interventions to increase girls' enrollment to or retention in the schools, although *equity* in this program was measured mainly by access-related indicators on gender parity index. Overall, the achievement of the objectives appears to be challenging when the outcome was or should have been measured by learning assessments. See "Performance of Learning Outcome Objectives and Indicators" below for further information.

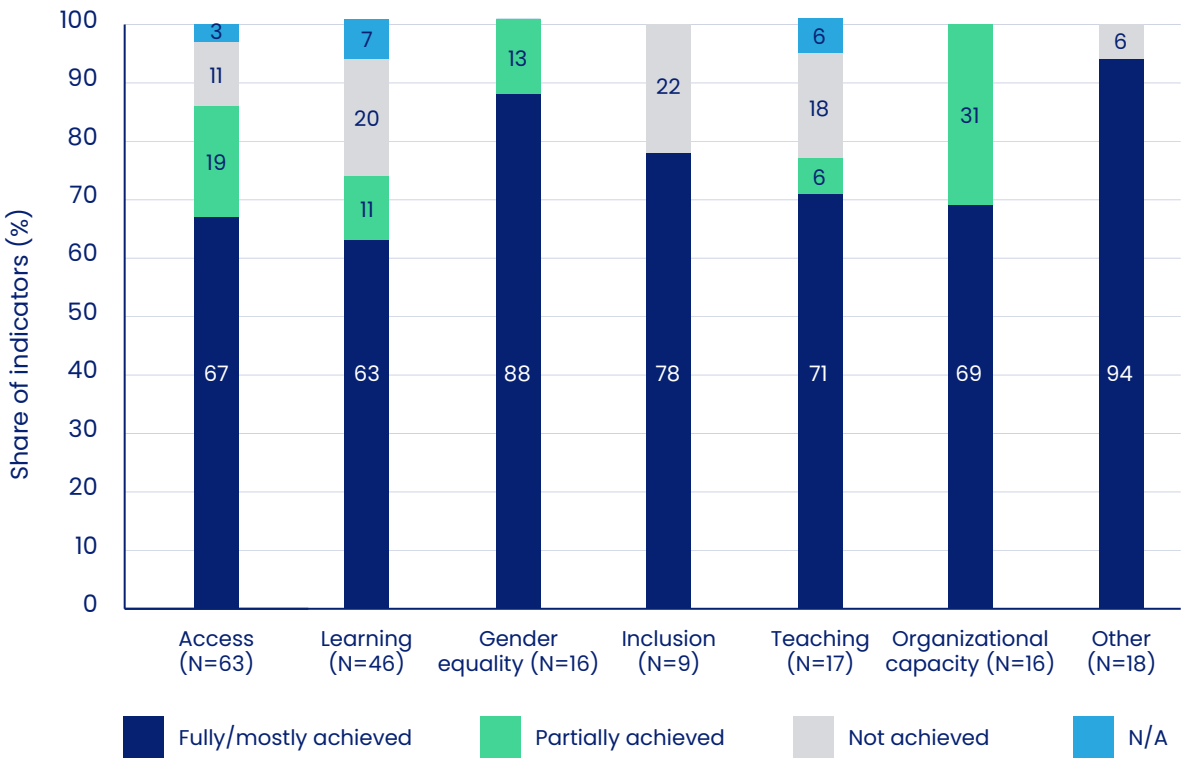
Achievement at the Level of Indicators That Are Associated with the Objectives

Achievement level of an objective of the program is usually measured by one or more indicators. To understand the level of achievement for each indicator and to identify any patterns, the coding team for this review put together all 167 indicators measuring the achievement of the 63 objectives included in the 26 programs.[31] The indicators were sorted into three categories: fully achieved (target was 90–100 percent met), partially achieved (target was 50–89 percent met) and not achieved (target was less than 50 percent met), in accordance with the methodology used by GPE's completion report review in 2019.[32] Out of 167 indicators, targets were fully or mostly achieved for 115 indicators (or 69 percent of all indicators), partially achieved for 24 indicators (14 percent) and not achieved for 22 indicators (13 percent).[33]

The achievement status of the indicators varies across GPE 2025 priority areas, from learning for which 63 percent of indicators were fully or mostly achieved to gender equality for which 88 percent of the indicators were fully or mostly achieved (figure 2). Of 46 indicators in the learning area, 29 mostly or fully achieved the target, 6 partially achieved, 6 did not achieve and 5 were missing final value or target value. Of these 46 indicators, 26 measured progress in learning outcome, of which only 12 (46 percent) fully or mostly achieved their targets. This level of achievement is relatively low compared with all indicators at outcome level (see discussion below), 57 percent of which fully or mostly achieved targets.

31. For this analysis, both World Bank and non–World Bank programs are included.
32. See GPE, "Review of Completion Reports for the Global Partnership for Education's Education Sector Program Implementation Grants: 2016–2018."
33. For the remaining six indicators, data were not available in the results frameworks.

Figure 2. Achievement level of program objective indicators, by GPE 2025 priority areas

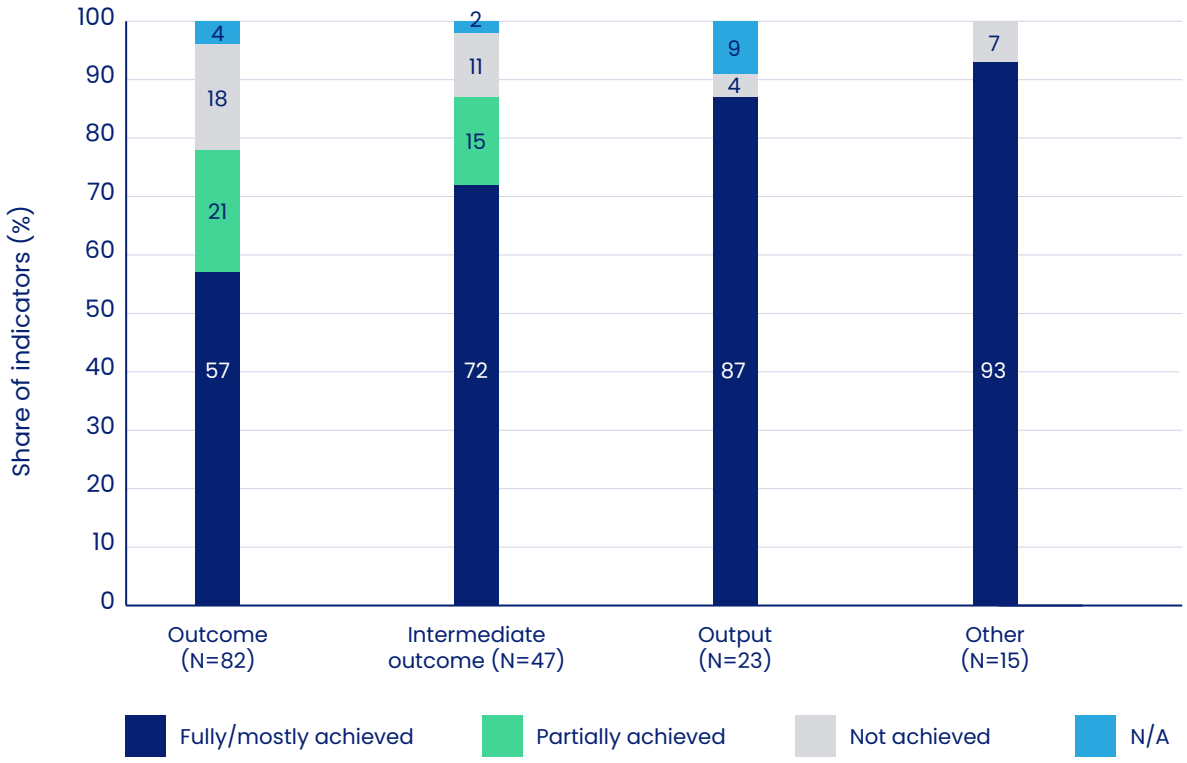


Note: The total number of indicators doesn't match with the number mentioned in the main text because indicators addressing more than one priority area are counted multiple times. For example, if an indicator measuring improvement in gender parity index for gross enrollment ratio fully achieved its target, that indicator is counted toward the fully/mostly achieved category for both access and gender equality. Two priority areas (early learning and domestic finance) are not included in the figure because the number of indicators were small. Most of the indicators categorized under other are on the number of beneficiaries. N/A was used when data were not available to measure the level of achievement.

Indicator achievement status also varies depending on the nature of the indicators. Although the 167 indicators analyzed in this section are the ones that measure the high-level results for which the programs are held accountable, not all of them are outcome oriented. Some are intermediate-outcome or output in nature. The coding team for this review categorized the indicators into outcome, intermediate outcome and output. For example, in the area of learning, the team categorized an indicator monitoring the improvement in learning outcome as outcome, increase in teacher competency as intermediate outcome, and number of teachers trained as output. In the area of access, the team categorized improvement in enrollment as outcome and the number of schools constructed as output. It was found that the proportion of indicators that fully or mostly achieved the target was highest for output and lowest for outcome (figure 3). It is assumed that the outcome-oriented indicators are harder to achieve because of external factors at play and also because of the limited program time. GPE's grant policy

sets out that grant duration should be three to four years for education sector program implementation grants. Most programs included in this review extended their grant duration (see chapter 5), and the actual grant duration ranged from 3.02 years to 8.27 years, with an average of 4.82 years (see "Timeliness of Implementation" in chapter 5).

Figure 3. Achievement status of program objective indicators, by level



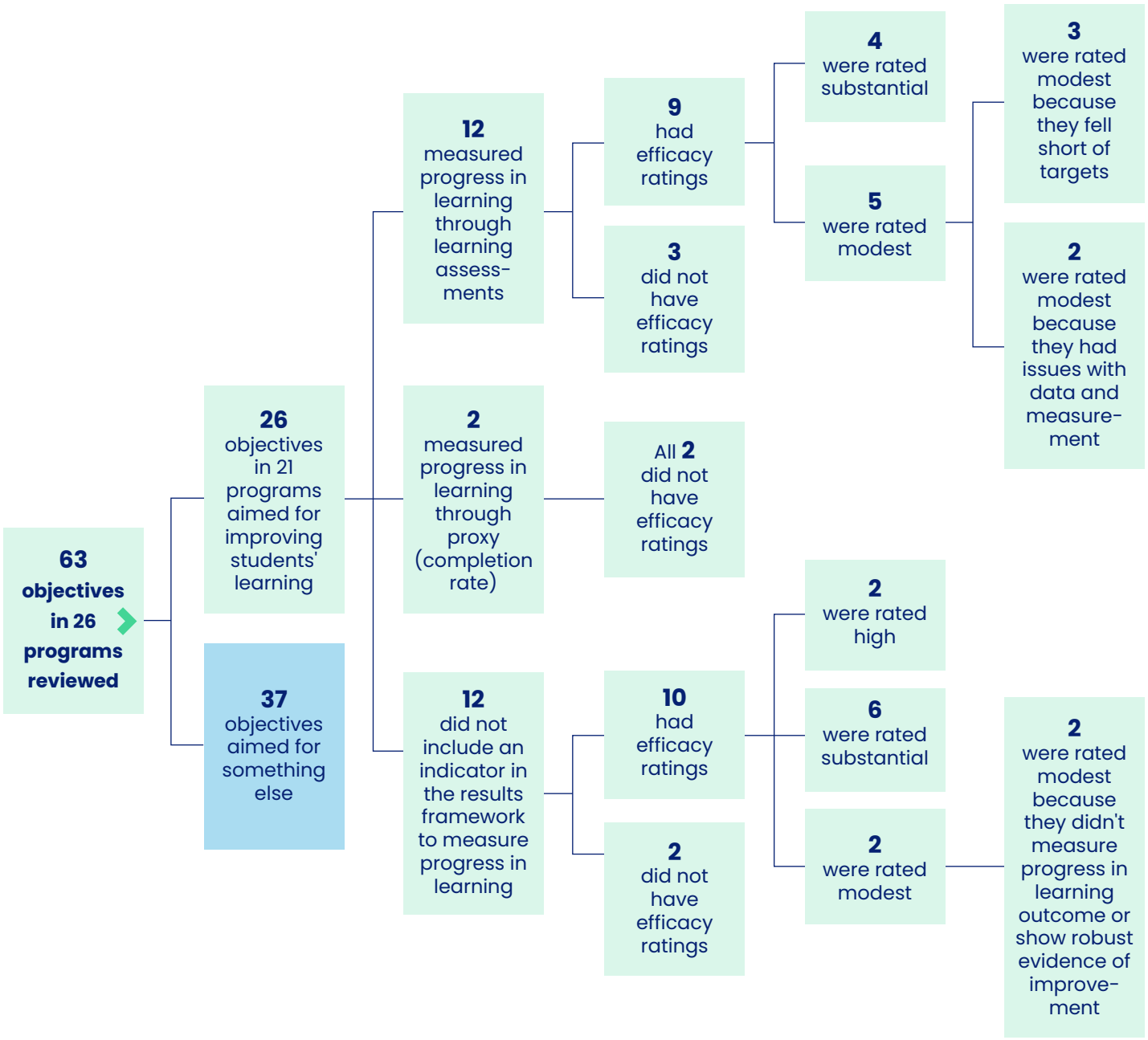
Note: Indicators that fall under the category of other mostly monitor the number of beneficiaries of program interventions, and they are mostly at the level of output. N/A = not available.

Performance of Learning Outcome Objectives and Indicators

Of the 63 objectives included in 26 programs reviewed, 26 objectives in 21 programs aimed for improving students' learning.[34] Of these 26 objectives, 12 measured progress in learning through learning assessments.[35] Of these 12 objectives, 9 had efficacy ratings. Four of these objectives were rated substantial and another 5 were rated modest (figure 4).

34. See the footnote in box 1 for caveats.
35. See box 1 on how they measured improvement in learning for the remaining 13 objectives.

Figure 4. Objectives related to learning outcome and their performance



The four learning outcome objectives that were rated substantial were in The Gambia, Guinea, Lao PDR and Togo programs. In The Gambia, the program implemented several interventions to improve teacher performance and quality of curriculum, and the mean scores in grade 3 students improved from 41.5 in 2012 to 47.8 in 2018, exceeding the target. In Lao PDR, the program sought to improve pre-primary education quality by strengthening school-based management and by enhancing teaching and learning environment to support reading readiness among 5-year-olds. Although the targets are not available, the program's impact evaluation shows that the share of children with awareness of print increased by 1.9 percentage points, from a baseline of 2.2 percent to 4.1 percent, and the share of children scoring 0 in a letter-sounding task in the Lao alphabet declined by 20 percentage points, from 25.7 to 5.7 percent. In Guinea, by improving the quality of the teaching and the learning environment, reading fluency in number of words per minute improved from 7 words per minute in 2015 to 43 words per minute in 2018, exceeding the target. In Togo, the program aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning through development and provision of new textbooks and teachers' guides, along with school grants for acquiring learning materials, and teacher training, assessment and coaching. The percentage of students in grade 2 who attained minimum standards on national learning assessment tests increased from 28.5 percent in 2013 to 42.8 percent in 2019 in reading/writing, and from 36 percent in 2013 to 46.5 percent in 2019 in math, both exceeding the targets.

Completion reports of those programs with substantial learning outcome objectives discuss the factors that they considered instrumental in achieving the results, including good institutional capacity, stability in the team implementing and supporting the program (in the government and in grant agent), and participation of senior management of the ministry of education in the program supervision. While those factors may be country specific, notably, two reports with substantial learning outcome ratings, as well as other reports with modest learning outcome ratings, emphasize the importance of a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and monitoring arrangements, not only to systematically document the achievements but also to detect issues that delay program implementation and/or pose a challenge to the attainment of the objectives.

On the other hand, the five learning outcome objectives that were rated modest either fell short of the targets (Kenya, Mauritania and Nigeria) or they had issues with data and/or measurement (Cameroon and Uganda). Three objectives fell short of learning outcome targets. For Kenya and Nigeria, the outcome indicators were related to early grade literacy or mathematics. In Kenya, the math competency level of grade 2 students decreased from 79.1 percent in 2017 to 76.6 percent in 2019, and then increased to 81.5 percent in 2021, falling short of the target of 84.1 percent. In light of the decrease in 2019, the program used additional financing from GPE to implement evidence-based course

correction measures, which contributed to the increase in the students' competency level from 2019 to 2021. In Nigeria, the completion report discusses several issues that might have accounted for the nonachievement of the target: delays and shortened implementation period;[36] use of midline survey as the end results of the program because of postponement of end-line learning assessment due to the COVID-19 pandemic; the effects of increased enrollments on teaching quality; and relatively elevated student and teacher absenteeism. For Mauritania, the outcome indicator measured the proportion of graduates from teacher training institutions who mastered the minimum required competencies.[37] The target was not achieved because students did not complete the originally envisaged three-year training program; the government decided to have the third-year students teach in schools instead of completing teacher training institutions, to address the nationwide shortage of primary teachers.

The two other learning objectives rated modest (Cameroon and Uganda) were so rated because of a lack of data and measurement issues. They used early grade learning assessments to measure the outcome. In both programs, the progress in children's learning was not measurable, mainly because there were no comparable data that can prove the effectiveness of program interventions. In Cameroon, there were no baseline data that were comparable to the end line.[38] In Uganda, both the baseline and the end line measured the progress of a single cohort of students, which makes it difficult to determine whether the students' performance improved because of the program interventions or simply because they progressed from grade 1 through grade 3.[39]

Additionally, the performance of two other learning objectives (in Guinea and Nepal) were rated modest because of measurement issues, in part because these programs did not include an indicator in the results framework to measure progress in learning. For Guinea, one of the objectives was to improve literacy among underserved populations. The program measured increase in enrollment to literacy centers, but not the achievement in terms of learning outcome of the participants of literacy classes. Because of the lack of an indicator monitoring the outcome as expressed in the objective, IEG rated this objective modest.[40] Similarly, IEG rated the Nepal program's objective to improve quality of school

36. The implementation period was shortened because of initial delays and prolonged disruption to schooling because of the COVID-19 pandemic, though it was eventually extended and the program lasted for five years and a month.
37. The program in Mauritania aimed to improve quality of pre-service teacher training in primary education. This is considered as programs that aimed to improve learning outcomes, because it assessed their proficiency in language and mathematics in their third year through a test.
38. Baseline values were expected to be determined during the first year of project implementation. However, this was not possible given the slow pace of implementation (Cameroon ICR, p. 43). An assessment was carried out in 2014, but the methodology used for this assessment differed from the one used for the end line; therefore, the two results are not comparable.
39. IEG, Uganda ICRR, p. 8.
40. IEG, Guinea ICRR, p. 6.

education modest because the ICR did not provide robust evidence of improved quality demonstrated in results of learning assessment.[41]

Overall, modest performance of learning outcome objectives is either due to nonachievement of the targets or issues related to data and/or measurement. Box 3 describes findings from a descriptive analysis on factors behind achievement or nonachievement of learning outcome targets. Chapter 6 discusses availability and quality of theory of change and results framework in the reviewed programs.

Box 3. Descriptive analysis on factors behind achievement and nonachievement of learning outcome targets

To better understand the factors behind achievement or nonachievement of learning outcome targets, we conducted a descriptive analysis to see if there were any patterns in the level of ambition, the time taken to achieve the targets and the interventions included in the group of indicators that achieved targets and those that did not.[a] Information was collected from the completion reports on several variables, including the following (see the full table in appendix 2):

- Type of interventions that were expected to contribute to the improvement in learning outcomes
- Expected increase in learning outcome from baseline to end line (for example, in percentage points)
- The number of months they had from baseline to end line
- Whether the indicator measured performance at the national level or it measured performance of a pilot or of selected areas
- Whether the program document shows that the interventions are based on evidence.

Observations from the descriptive analysis:

- Not all programs that achieved learning outcome indicators had a longer time to make the intended improvement than those that didn't achieve them. The number of months from baseline to end line for those indicators that met their targets ranged from 24 months to 74 months. Similarly, the number of months from baseline to end line for those indicators that did not meet their targets varied from 24 months to 63 months. Most of the programs extended their implementation periods, but the extension did not contribute, at least not sufficiently, to the achievement of the targets.

41. An objective in the Mozambique program that aimed for improving the quality of education but did not measure progress in learning outcome was rated substantial. This objective could have been rated modest if the absence of evidence in improvement in learning outcome to measure improved quality of education can be the reason for the modest rating, just like Nepal.

- All programs, regardless of their indicator performance, included more than one intervention to improve learning (for example, teacher training and provision of teaching and learning materials). The number of intervention types included ranged from two to six. It appears that not all programs that funded a greater variety of interventions achieved their goals.
- A quick review of the description of program components in program documents shows less than 60 percent of programs had interventions that included at least one component shown to be among the set of effective interventions to increase learning based on existing reviews.[b] These interventions incorporated one or more of the following elements: scripted lesson plans, teacher guides, teacher coaches, remedial learning, school-based management to strengthen accountability, and early childhood care and education that focused on foundational skills. Their level of achievement varies, confirming that what works in one place does not necessarily work in the same way everywhere. For the remaining programs, the extent to which components were aligned to evidence is unclear. Moreover, program documents don't generally discuss the reasons behind selecting specific interventions to improve learning. Further research is needed to understand the characteristics of the interventions that were effective in achieving the goals (for example, the evidence base used to select the intervention, whether there was a pilot to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention prior to the program, whether the evidence was successfully adapted to the local context and was based on sector diagnostic).
- Although it was difficult to identify the target areas for learning outcome interventions from the available documentation, most of the indicators that did not meet their target measured improvements at the national level. Of those that did meet their targets, a few targeted the national level and others measured the achievement of a pilot or for targeted provinces/districts.
- Comparing levels of ambition is inherently difficult because programs used different learning assessment tools to measure improvements in learning outcomes. Some measured the proportion of children at a given grade meeting a minimum proficiency or benchmark, and others measured mean scores. Some measured reading proficiency and others measured reading and math.

a. Including those that partially achieved targets (that is, target was 50–89 percent achieved).

b. See, for example, David Evans and Yuan Fei, "What We Learn about Girls' Education from Interventions That Don't Focus on Girls" (Working Paper 513, Center for Global Development, Washington, DC, 2019); Alejandro Ganimian and Richard Murnane, "Improving Education in Developing Countries: Lessons from Rigorous Impact Evaluations," *Review of Educational Research* 86 (2016), no. 3; and Paul Glewwe and Karthik Muralidharan, "Improving School Education Outcomes in Developing Countries: Evidence, Knowledge Gaps, and Policy Implications" (RISE Working Paper 15/001, Research on Improving Systems of Education, Oxford, England, 2015), among others.

5. EFFICIENCY

Based on the OECD evaluation criteria, economic efficiency of a program refers to the absence of waste and conversion of inputs into results in the most cost-efficient way possible. It includes assessing the efficiency of results at all levels of the results chain: outputs, outcomes and impacts. This also involves evaluating the extent to which appropriate choices were made and trade-offs addressed in the design stage and during implementation. These choices include how resources were allocated between target groups and time periods, as well as the options that were available for purchasing inputs according to market conditions.

In assessing efficiency, it is useful to distinguish between program efficiency and sectoral efficiency.[42] Program efficiency has to do with whether project funds are used to achieve maximum value for money, whereas efficiency of the education sector improves when indicators like enrollment rate or completion rate increase.

Since economic efficiency of a program is about cost-effectiveness in use of program resources, we broadly look at two aspects of a program as reported in completion reports to examine whether programs were implemented cost-effectively or at least cost: (a) economic analysis of cost-effective use of program resources based on a cost-benefit and/or unit cost of inputs analysis and (b) efficiency in program implementation.

Overall Efficiency Rating

A rating of overall efficiency is provided in the completion reports and the IEG's Implementation Completion and Result Report Reviews (ICRRs) for programs where the grant agent is the World Bank. The rating is based on the evidence of cost-effectiveness presented in the completion reports based on an economic analysis of cost-effectiveness (based on cost-benefit analysis and/or unit cost) and a discussion on the extent of efficiency in use of resources during project operation and implementation. The rating categories for efficiency are high, substantial, modest and negligible.

Of the 19 programs where the grant agent is the World Bank, information on efficiency rating is available in completion reports and ICRRs for 18 programs. In the ICRRs, 1 program is rated high, 7 programs are rated substantial, and more than half the programs (10 out of 18) are rated modest (table 5). For 5 programs out of 18, the completion reports' self-

42. GPE, "Review of Value for Money Analyses in Closed GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants."

rating of the program (substantial) is higher than IEG's rating (modest) in the ICRR. For 1 program, the ICRR rating (high) is higher than that in the completion report (substantial). So overall, the rating in the ICRRs tends to be more conservative than the self-rating in the completion reports.

Table 5. Overall efficiency rating in completion reports and ICRRs (*N*=18)

ICRR RATING	ICR RATING		
	Modest	Substantial	N (number of programs)
Modest	5	5	10
Substantial	0	7	7
High	0	1	1
N	5	13	18

There are many reasons behind the ICRRs' modest rating for program overall efficiency (table 6). Implementation or operational inefficiency is noted in every case (out of 10), while issues with the economic analysis of cost-effectiveness in use of resources is noted in 4 (out of 10) programs. For programs with a substantial rating, implementation efficiency is noted in every case (out of 7), a favorable rate of return is noted in 4 programs, and cost savings in unit costs is noted in 1 program. For the program that has a high rating, implementation efficiency and a solid evidence-based, cost-effective intervention to improve foundational skills are highlighted as reasons behind the rating.

Table 6. Reasons given for program overall efficiency rating in ICRRs (*N*=18)

MODEST RATING		SUBSTANTIAL RATING		HIGH RATING	
Reason	N	Reason	N	Reason	N
Issue with economic analysis	-	Low rate of return but implementation efficiency	1	Implementation efficiency and use of evidence-based, cost-effective intervention to improve foundational skills	1
Implementation/operational inefficiencies	6	Implementation efficiency	1		
Both of the above (issues with economic analysis and implementation inefficiency)	4	Implementation efficiency and high return	4		
N	5	Implementation efficiency and cost savings in unit costs	1		

Economic Analysis in Completion Reports

A standard approach for assessing cost-effectiveness in use of program resources is using a cost-benefit analysis (CBA). Additionally, information on unit costs of program inputs gives an idea of whether inputs are selected at least cost—that is, whether appropriate choices made in procuring and delivering input. The following sections examine the extent to which programs supported by GPE grants deliver results in an economic manner based on a cost-effectiveness analysis and/or unit costs of inputs reported in the completion reports.

Of the 26 program completion reports, about half report a CBA, about half report unit cost for at least one key input, and about a third report both a CBA and unit costs. In almost all cases of a CBA, the internal rate of return is higher than the discount rate, and therefore the project is considered cost-effective. Similarly, in unit cost analyses, costs tend to be lower than comparator costs, suggesting cost-effectiveness in use of input.

Assessment of Cost-Effectiveness Based on CBA in Completion Reports

Of the 26 completion reports, 13 (50 percent) include a cost-effectiveness analysis based on a CBA (table 7 and figure 5). At appraisal, 10 (38 percent) program appraisal documents (PADs) include a CBA. Annex 3 provides country-wise information on whether CBA and unit costs were reported at completion and appraisal.

Disaggregating by grant agent, a CBA is found at completion (and/or appraisal) only when the grant agent is the World Bank (table 7 and figure 5). Among programs where the grant agent is a non–World Bank entity (UNICEF, Sida, DFID), none has a CBA. Among World Bank grants at completion, 13 out of 19 (68 percent) report a CBA. This is a higher percentage than that reported in the 2019 VfM analysis, which found that among the 17 World Bank grant documents at completion, 10 (59 percent) used a CBA to measure efficiency.[43] And among the non–World Bank programs, similar to this current review, none of the 14 non–World Bank program documents reported a CBA.

A more detailed description of the different components and results of the CBAs is included in annex 4.

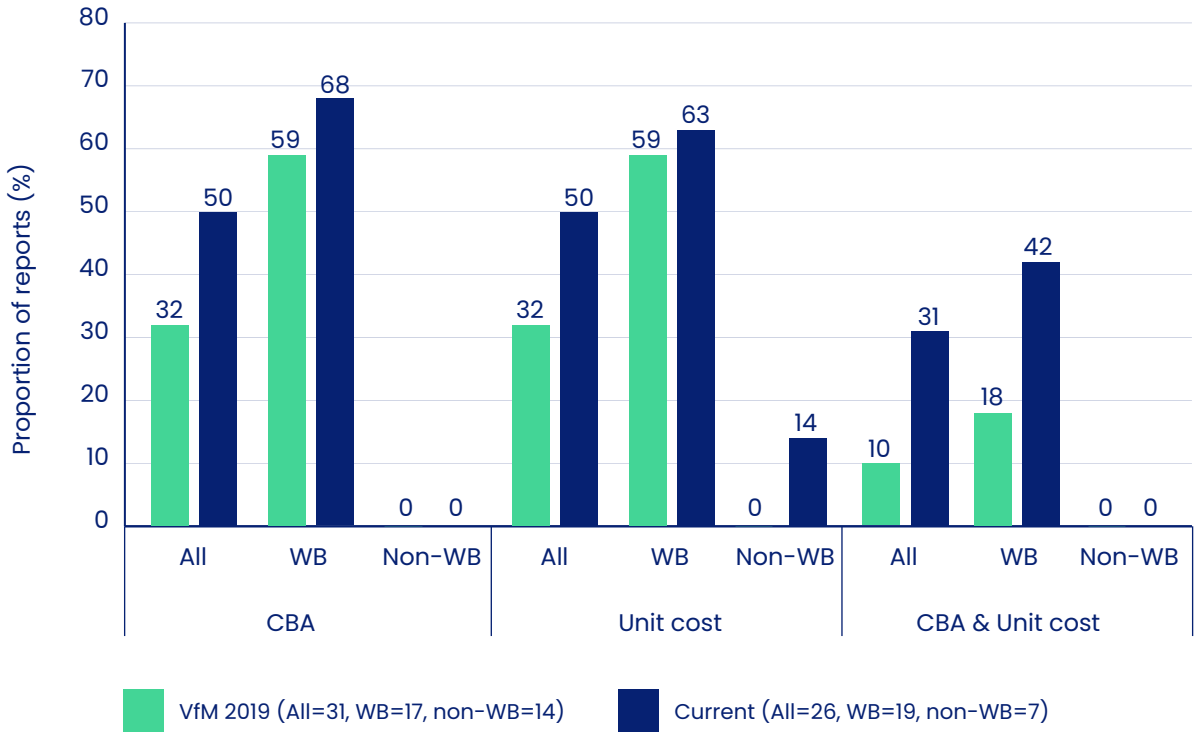
43. In addition, 10 (59 percent) used a unit cost comparison and 3 (18 percent) used both. GPE, "Review of Value for Money Analyses in Closed GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants."

Table 7. Economic (or efficiency) analysis in completion reports by grant agent

GRANT AGENT	COMPLETION REPORTS		COMPLETION REPORTS WITH CBA		PADS WITH CBA	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
DFID	1	4	0	0	0	0
Sida	1	4	0	0	0	0
UNICEF	5	20	0	0	0	0
World Bank	19	72	13	68	10	53
Total	26	100	13	50	10	38

Note: CBA = cost-benefit analysis; DFID=Department of International Development (UK); PAD = program appraisal document; Sida: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Figure 5. Percent of completion reports by type of efficiency analysis



Note: CBA = cost-benefit analysis; VfM 2019 = GPE "Review of Value for Money Analyses in Closed GPE Education Sector Program Implementation Grants," 2019; WB = World Bank.

Assessment of Unit Cost of Inputs in Completion Reports

Unit costs provide information on whether inputs are selected at least cost—that is, whether

appropriate choices are made in procuring and delivering input. Only about half of the completion reports provide unit cost information for key inputs such as textbooks, teacher guides, classroom construction and toilets; generally, costs tend to be below comparator or at appraisal. Lower unit costs are due to factors such as economies of scale in procuring inputs, more efficient procurement practices, cost savings in implementation and using alternative models of classroom construction.

Annex 3 lists whether the completion reports include any information on the unit cost of inputs. Of the 26 completion reports, 13 (or 50 percent) provide some information on the unit cost of at least one program-related input (see also figure 5). In the documents provided at appraisal, 8 of the 26 programs give unit cost information (table 5.1). For 6 programs, information on unit costs is given in both appraisal and completion documents.

By grant agent, as figure 5 shows, among the 19 World Bank completion reports, 12 (63 percent) report unit costs, and 8 (42 percent) report both CBA and unit costs; only 1 (14 percent) of the 7 non–World Bank completion reports has unit costs. In comparison, among the 17 World Bank completion reports looked at for the 2019 VfM review, 10 (59 percent) report unit costs and 3 (18 percent) report both CBA and unit costs, while none of the 14 non–World Bank reports had this information.

Interventions for Which Unit Cost Information Is Reported

Table 8 lists by country the inputs for which unit cost information is provided at completion. These include textbooks, teacher guides, classroom construction, toilets, dormitory rooms, water tank and fence wall. For example, in Ethiopia's completion report, unit cost is given for textbooks (primary $0.47, secondary $0.74). In Guinea's completion report, unit costs are provided for classrooms and furniture ($28,618), school health and hygiene (latrines and water points) ($5,508), teacher training and pedagogical support ($182) and teaching-learning material ($1.1).

Comparators of Unit Costs

Comparators of unit costs, when provided, are one or more of the following: unit costs anticipated at the appraisal stage, unit costs of similar interventions in state- or donor-funded programs, or unit costs in other countries in the region. Of the 13 completion reports that provide at least one unit cost, 12 provide at least one comparator to the unit costs. Table 8 includes the comparator unit costs by country. The comparator unit costs are for one or more of the following: appraisal stage (7 programs), state-funded projects (2 programs), donor-funded project including a previous project (3 programs), and/or other countries in the region (6 programs).

Table 8. Unit cost comparison results at completion

	COUNTRY	INPUT	UNIT COST AT COMPLETION	UNIT COST STATE-FUNDED	UNIT COST DONOR-FUNDED/	UNIT COST IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION
1	Cameroon	Textbook	$2.7 (grade 1) $3.6 (grade 3)		At appraisal: $3 (grade 1)–$4.2 (grade 3)	Niger: $4.5 (grade 1) Chad: $5 (grade 1) Namibia: $7.5 (grade 1)
2	Ethiopia	Textbook	Primary: $0.47 Secondary: $0.74		Previous project GEQIP-I	
3	Gambia, The	Subject textbook	$0.24 (grade 1)[1] $0.57(grade 9)[2]		Previous project: $0.60	
		Teacher guides	$0.19 (grade 1),[2] $0.81 (grade 9)[3]		Previous project: $0.60	
		Classroom construction	$229–$276 (per m^2)		Previous project: $191–$268 (per m^2)	
4	Guinea	Classrooms and Furniture	$28,618		At appraisal: $27,414	
		School health and hygiene (latrines and water points)	$5,508		At appraisal: $7,333	
		Teacher training and pedagogical support	$182		At appraisal: $355	
		Teaching-learning material (TLM)	$1.1		At appraisal: $2.2	
5	Malawi	Classroom construction	$15,000 (per classroom block of 2 classrooms)	$40,000 (standard cost)		
6	Mauritania	Pedagogical kit	$4.67		At appraisal: $7.03	Benin, Ghana and Mali: $6.73–$50 (pedagogical kit)
		Pre-service teacher training	MRO 3,097		At appraisal: MRO 2,215 (pre-service teacher training), MRO 3,800 (in-service teacher training)	
7	Mozambique	Classroom construction	$15,850		At appraisal: $16,000	
		Teacher training per student	$1,452	$1,866 (per tertiary education student)		Sub-Saharan Africa $2,095 (per tertiary education student)

	COUNTRY	INPUT	UNIT COST AT COMPLETION	UNIT COST STATE-FUNDED	UNIT COST DONOR-FUNDED/	UNIT COST IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION
8	Niger	Scholarship (per girl student)	FCFA 20,000			
		Classroom construction (block of 2 classrooms, block of 3 classrooms)	$210 (per m^2), $189 (per m^2)		Similar classroom cost (previous operations)	Graph comparing classroom costs in other sub-Saharan African countries
9	Nigeria	School improvement grant (SIGs)	$938 (per school, primary) $730 (per school, pre-primary)		At appraisal: $1,450 (per school, primary), $720 (per school, pre-primary)	
		TPD (teacher training)	$67 (per teacher)		At appraisal: $150 (per teacher)	
		Girls' scholarship	$70 (per girl)		At appraisal: $180 (per girl)	
		Female teacher scholarship	$146 (per teacher)		At appraisal: $180 (per teacher)	
		School-Based Management Committees (SBMC) training	$6 (per SBMC member trained)		At appraisal: $570 (per SBMC member trained)	
10	Sudan	Textbook	$0.3–$0.67 (per textbook)		At appraisal: $1.88 (per textbook)	
11	Togo	Classroom construction	$16,600 (per classroom block of 3 classrooms)		At appraisal: $16,600 (school construction plus borehole)	
		Latrine	$5,320 (per latrine block of 3)			
		Borehole	$1,786		At appraisal: $5,320	
		Teacher training	$221		At appraisal: $214	
12	Uzbekistan	ICT equipment per unit	$188			ICT equipment: China: $700
		Kindergarten/ECE center	$5,748			Kindergarten/ECE center: Kyrgyz Republic: $1,689 Mongolia: $26,000

Note: ECE = early childhood education; FCFA = CFA francs; ICT = information and communication technology; MRO = Mauritanian ouguiyas.
1. Integrated Social and Environmental Studies
2. Science

models for classroom construction. Table 9 provides a count of the number of programs/ countries for which a particular reason is mentioned for unit cost differential relative to the comparator(s).

For example, in The Gambia, lower unit costs of textbooks and teacher guides relative to the comparator (previous program, other countries in the region) are attributed to the experience of the selected firm (that is, efficient procurement) and economies of scale in procurement of textbooks and guides. In Malawi, the model of community constructed classrooms is cited as the reason for substantially lower cost of classroom construction relative to more expensive conventional construction of classrooms. The completion report states: "*The new model of low-cost community-constructed classrooms provided a considerably lower cost alternative to more expensive conventional classroom construction in Malawi, and enabled a more rapid and wider-scale construction of classrooms. Compared to the standard cost of a two-classroom block of more than $40,000, low-cost alternative for two-classroom block under the project was $15,000, over 60 percent cheaper*."

In *Mozambique*, the completion report cites overall lower transaction costs and better procurement and distribution of textbooks: "*Using multiple additional financing (rather than new operations) led to overall lower transaction costs. Textbook unit costs decreased due to the government obtaining of licenses for grades 1-2 textbooks, which reduced unit costs by 17 percent between 2011 and 2015. Procedures for procuring textbooks for grades 3 to 7 changed, by adopting a price-adjustment formula for reordering, based on overheads and independently verifiable indicators of increases in labor costs and materials. Additionally, government acquired a software to solve bottlenecks related to books' distribution to schools*."

Table 9. Reasons for lower or higher unit cost relative to the comparator

	LOWER UNIT COST RELATIVE TO COMPARATOR					HIGHER UNIT COST RELATIVE TO COMPARATOR	
INPUT	Economies of scale	New model of community constructed classrooms/ half-day ECE model	Efficient procurement	Efficient implementation	Use of multiple AFs led to lower transaction cost	Conflict/ violence	Underestimation at appraisal
Textbooks/ guides	3		4		1		
Pedagogical kits			1				
Classroom		2			1		
ECE center		1					
All inputs				2		1	1
Total count	3	3	5	2	2	1	1

Note: The number in cell represents the count of the number of programs/countries. AF = additional financing; ECE = early childhood education.

Grant Unit Costs in This Review Compared with Those in the 2019 VfM Review

Table 10 lists the country-specific unit costs at completion in the 2019 VfM review and in the present analysis for common inputs. Note that the higher end of unit costs tends to be lower for classroom, textbook, school construction and school kits in the current review, but there is a lot of variation across countries, so it is hard to generalize. It is also important to note that there is variation in quality and quantity of the inputs even within the same input (such as classrooms or textbooks), so the unit costs are not strictly comparable across countries and years.

Table 10. Unit costs at completion in current review compared with those in the 2019 VfM review

	2019 VFM REVIEW	CURRENT REVIEW
Classroom	Benin $12,579–$16,653; Mali $13,750; Liberia $37,166; Congo, Dem. Rep. $40,800; Djibouti $38,510	Malawi $15,000 (block of 2 classrooms); Mozambique $15,850; Togo $16,600 (per classroom block of 3 classrooms); Guinea $28,618
Textbook	Congo, Dem. Rep. $1.88–$2.06; Liberia $4	Gambia, The $0.24–$0.57; Ethiopia $0.24–$0.74; Sudan $0.3–$0.67; Cameroon $2.7–$3.6
School construction per sq. m	Congo, Dem. Rep. $226; Tajikistan $331	Niger $200; Gambia, The $229–$276
Teacher training	Vietnam $37; Mali $824; Benin $840	Nigeria $67; Guinea $182; Togo $221; Mauritania MRO 3,097; Mozambique $1,452
Latrine block	Benin $2,754–$3,464; Mali $4,146	Guinea $5,508; Togo $5,320 (per latrine block of 3)
School kit	Mali $6.73	Mauritania $4.67 (pedagogical kit)

Note: MRO = Mauritanian ouguiyas.

Implementation Efficiency

OECD evaluation criteria has two elements related to implementation efficiency: operational efficiency and timeliness of implementation. The former is mainly about the effective use of resources toward generating greater program efficiency; it deals with appropriate and full utilization of resources and reallocation of resources as needs changed. The latter is to assess to what extent the results were achieved within the intended time frame and whether the original time frame was realistic and appropriate in the first place.

Utilization of Grant Funds

Twelve out of the 26 programs did not spend the original grant allocation in full. The amount unspent is small (less than a million dollars) for 6 programs. However, 6 other programs had a relatively large amount unspent ($2 million–$14 million) (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger and Zambia), and in at least 4 programs the underspend was partly because the triggers for additional financing were not achieved (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Malawi and Zambia). In Niger, the underspend had to do with extra resources generated from exchange rate–related gains and a shorter extension allowed, which made it difficult to complete all activities.

Budget Reallocation and Factors behind Reallocation

Of the 26 programs, 13 (54 percent) reallocated funds. The factors behind the reallocation of funds are summarized in annex 5. These include underestimation and/or overestimation

of costs at appraisal (6 programs), gains from exchange rate (5 programs), emergency needs (3 programs), cost savings from efficiency gains during implementation/ procurement (2 programs), implementation delay of component(s) (2 programs) and extra funds available from another grant (1 program).

In every case, the respective completion report indicates that the reallocation helped respond to an evolving situation or need, and to adapt the interventions, making them more relevant (see "Alignment to Countries' Priorities" in chapter 3 for an example from Cameroon).

Timeliness of Implementation

Extension of Programs Past Expected Closing Date

Of the 26 programs, 25 had an extension of the closing date. Of the 25 programs with an extension, 11 had one extension, 7 had two extensions, 5 had three extensions, 1 (Eritrea) had four extensions and 1 (Yemen) had six extensions (table 11) (see also annex 7); the cumulative extension period until closing was 18 months on average.

Table 11. Number and duration of program extensions

NUMBER OF EXTENSIONS	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	PERCENT OF PROGRAMS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF MONTHS EXTENDED
1	11	44	10
2	7	28	19
3	5	20	23
4	1	4	37
6	1	4	52
Total	25	100	18

Most programs that extended more than 18 months mention initial delay, which is consistent with the findings of disbursement pattern analysis included in *GPE's Grant Performance Report 2019*.[44] For example, programs that mention initial delays in ICR/ICRR (cumulative months extended in parentheses) are as follows: Mauritania (19), bankruptcy

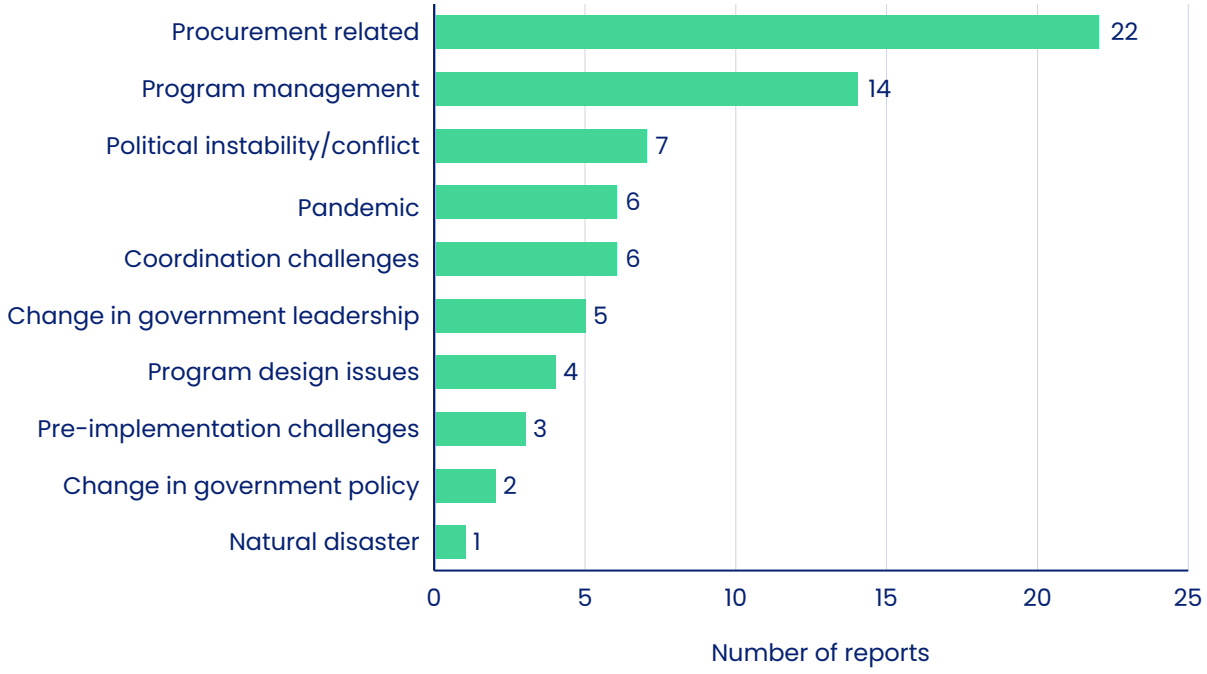
44. Findings from disbursement pattern analysis showed that low disbursement in the first year of implementation is an early warning sign of slow implementation and challenges in the implementation process. An analysis of multiyear trends in education sector program implementation grant implementation and disbursement patterns shows that grants that take more than four years to implement and those that eventually have to be extended and restructured generally have low disbursements in the first years of implementation. Most of these grants disburse funds at a slower rate that remains relatively even throughout the implementation period. In contrast, grants with a shorter implementation period typically disburse most of their funds early.

of bank where project account was held in early stage of the program; Uzbekistan (23), delay in effectiveness and in selection of consultants, assessment of ECCE materials, and so on; Nigeria (24), effectiveness delay, presidential election; Sudan (24), early delay in setting up project implementation unit staffing; Niger (9), construction delay in the initial stage; Mozambique (6), initial delay due to funding structure (pooled fund); Lao PDR (30), delays in project year 1 and 2; Uganda (33), preliminary activities delayed. Thus, initial delay can be a warning sign for overall delay, and it can be addressed proactively with significant up-front efforts.

Causes of Implementation Delays

The programs' causes of implementation delays are categorized into 10 delay factors (figure 6), which are described in table 12. The most frequent factor, noted for 22 of 26 programs (85 percent), is delay due to procurement-related challenges, which is consistent with other delay factor analyses of GPE grants.[45] This is followed by program management challenges (14 programs; 54 percent), political instability/conflict (7 programs; 27 percent), pandemic (6 programs; 23 percent), coordination challenges (6 programs; 23 percent), change in government leadership (5 programs; 19 percent), program design issues (4 programs; 15 percent), pre-implementation challenges (3 programs; 12 percent), change in government policy (2 programs; 8 percent) and natural disaster (1 program; 4 percent).

Figure 6. Factors in implementation delay (*N*=26)



45. See, for example, *GPE's Grant Performance Report 2019*.

Table 12. Factors in implementation delay

NUMBER OF EXTENSIONS	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	PERCENT OF PROGRAMS
Procurement-related challenges	22	Capacity constraints, including lack of procurement staff with good technical and administrative knowledge and bandwidth. Complex procurement process, including bidding and contract signing. Noncompliance to social and environmental safeguards required by grant agent. Gap between estimated time/capacity required for procurement and the actual time/capacity required.
Program management–related challenges	14	Lack of capacity and ownership in education ministry. Delay in submitting extension request, unavailability of statistical data to inform the implementation plan.
Political instability, conflict	7	Conflict, coup d'état, political instability.
Pandemic	6	Changes in implementation plan due to school closure. Social distancing measures caused delays in teacher training, school construction, data collection for EMIS (which led to delay in verification of variable part indicators), etc. Supply chain disruption delayed procurement.
Coordination challenges	6	Grant agent's lack of capacity to effectively coordinate with the government, which resulted in delay in implementation, or to sign agreement to start implementation. Absence of functional local education group to put pressure for timely implementation.
Change in government leadership	5	Elections led to changes in leadership in the government, including education ministry and turnover at the staff involved in grant implementation.
Program design issues	4	Program design is too complicated, too ambitious, not fit for the country, or not flexible enough to adapt to changes.
Pre-implementation challenges	3	Delays in setting up project implementation / management unit (PIU/PMU), identification of sites for school construction, etc.
Change in government policy	2	Changes in government policies and priorities.
Natural disaster	1	Hurricane, cyclone, drought.

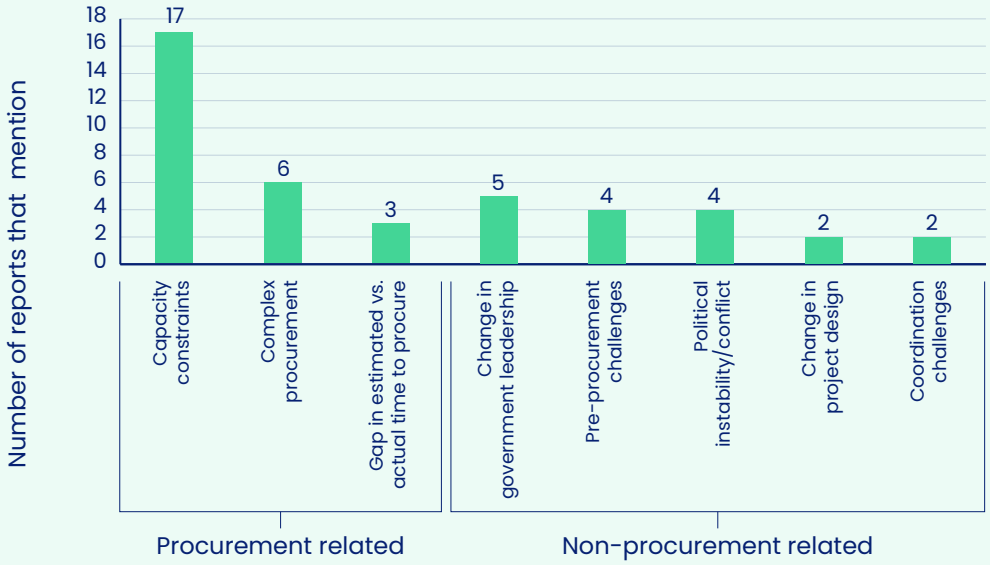
Note: EMIS = education management information system; PIU/PMU = project implementation unit/project management unit.

All of the completion reports, both World Bank and non–World Bank, mention at least one challenge leading to a delay in procurement. All but one (Caribbean) of the programs with procurement challenges were extended. Conversely, preventing procurement challenges is likely to help completing project activities in a timely manner. Box 4 looks at reasons for procurement delay and mitigation measures.

Box 4. Challenges in procurement

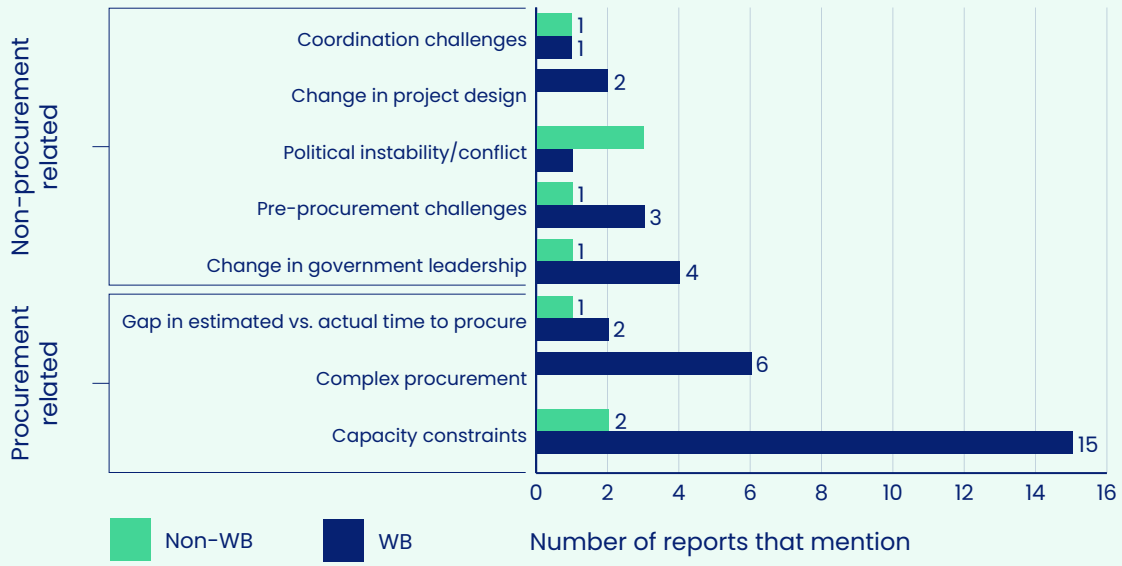
The factors cited in the completion reports or ICRRs as reasons for procurement delay are shown in figure B4.1 and annex 8. The most common reason for procurement delay has to do with capacity constraints (17 programs), which include lack of adequate procurement staff, lack of procurement staff with good technical and administrative knowledge, inability to deal with large volume of competing procurement demands, and lack of capacity in ministries and project units, complexities in the procurement process (6 programs), such as complex and lengthy contracts, gap between estimated and actual time required for procurement (3 programs).

Figure B4.1. Reasons for procurement delay (*N*=26)



Disaggregating by grant agent, the reasons behind procurement delay differ: for programs with the World Bank as the grant agent, the most frequent reason cited is capacity constraint, and for programs with non–World Bank grant agents, the most frequent reason cited is political instability and/or conflict (figure B4.2). But this may also be in part due to program funding modalities and whether a country is affected by fragility and conflict; when the World Bank is the grant agent (compared to non–World Bank), the funding modality is more likely to be sector or project pooled relative to standalone,[a] which might be one explanation for greater capacity constraints in World Bank programs; similarly, when the World Bank is the grant agent compared with non–World Bank, program countries are less likely to be affected by fragility and conflict, which might be an explanation for political instability/conflict mattering more in the latter.[b]

Figure B4.2. Reasons for procurement delay, by grant agent (*N*=26)



Note: WB = World Bank.

A number of completion reports (*n*=13) mention specific mitigation measures to address the procurement challenge at hand. Annex 8 provides a country-wise summary of the challenges and specific measures taken to address these. Given that a frequent challenge has to do with lack of capacity and complex procurement processes, a common redress measure was capacity building by hiring procurement staff with adequate expertise and/or providing the required training. For example, in Sudan, procurement delays were related to factors such as challenges in staffing in project implementation unit, procurement and capacity to implement community empowerment approach for construction, supplier deviating from contract that led to lack of quality assurance on textbooks supplied, and weak staff capacity in terms of strategic and financial planning by states and localities. To address these, the project took the following measures: to address low capacity, the project provided additional support to project unit, clusters and communities in procurement and financial management agreements and improved training modules for communities; to address supplier's deviation from contract, the project changed procurement process moving forward so that payments were made by batch instead of all at once; further, the project planned to have the project unit and cluster units provide close supervision of implementation. The project included training at federal and state levels in project management and implementation and plans to recruit international expertise to provide technical assistance in financial management and support in procurement. In Cameroon, the project unit lacked a procurement specialist, so a specialist was hired. And some other completion reports mention that training was provided to procurement staff.

Because the procurement challenge naturally tends to be country and context specific, to the extent that the mitigation accordingly has to be country specific, there is a need to learn from experience within the same country. At the same time, based on the common

challenges and redress measures used, some generalizations can be made to help mitigate or avoid procurement challenges, such as assessing and ensuring adequate capacity if the procurement is done within the government. Another solution may be to use the most efficient way of procuring goods and services in the country while investing in enhancing the procurement capacity of the government in the long term.

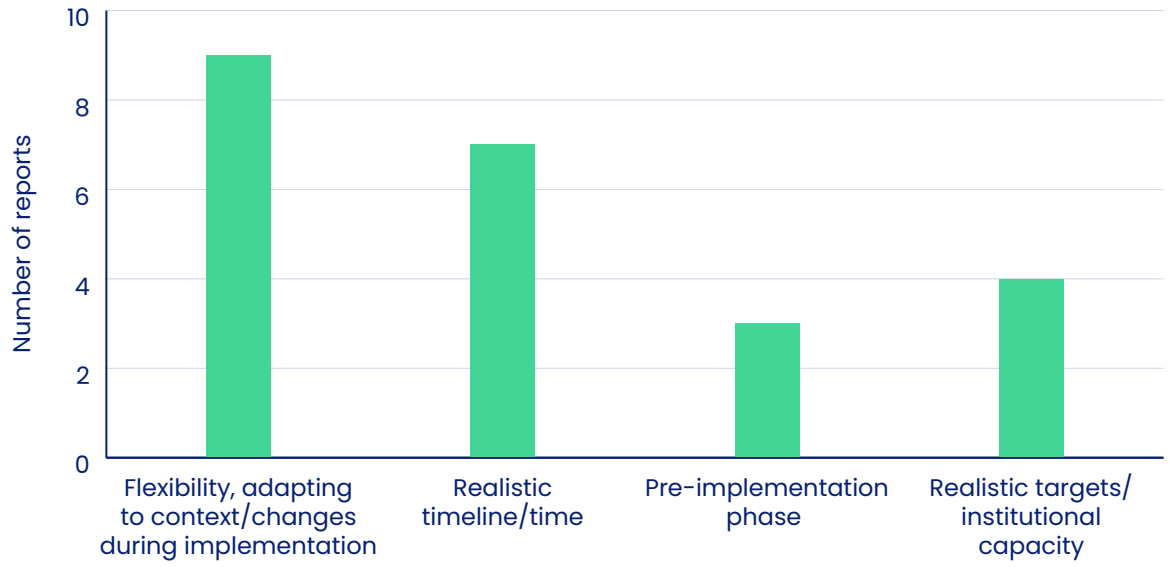
a. World Bank: 47 percent sector/project pooled, 53 percent standalone; non–World Bank: 14 percent sector/project pooled, 86 percent standalone.

b. World Bank: 47 percent countries affected by fragility and conflict; non–World Bank: 71 percent countries affected by fragility and conflict.

Factors That Could Make Implementation Smoother

The completion reports and/or ICRRs point to factors that could help realize a more realistic and easier implementation schedule. These include a need for greater flexibility built into the programming that allows adapting to context, evolving needs and changes during implementation; a more realistic timeline; a built-in pre-implementation phase; and setting realistic targets according to capacity and/or building greater institutional capacity (figure 7 and box 5). This indicates that the ease and timeline of implementation could benefit from better preparation, capacity building, greater flexibility and realistic target setting.

Figure 7. Factors suggested for smoother implementation in completion reports (*N*=26)



Note: Annex 8 lists country-wise factors suggested for smoother implementation.

Box 5. Factors that could help ease implementation

Several completion reports discuss factors that could help ease the implementation. Here are a few select quotes.

Ethiopia: "***In a project implemented in diverse regions*** *subject to distinct realities,* ***targets and timelines need to take into consideration region-specific peculiarities***."

Malawi: "*Adequate time is necessary for quality project implementation. Project achieved many of its objectives in the timeline required by the GPE (3/4 years), however, this was approved on an exceptional basis.* ***GPE policies that constrain time for implementation may impact the quality and/or sustainability of results****. Ensuring projects have adequate time to implement is especially important in the context of a country like Malawi which presents with numerous challenges due to poverty and low capacity. That MESIP was able to accomplish many of its targets in the tight timeline, demonstrates the hard efforts on the part of the Bank task team and the GoM.* ***Had targets been slightly less ambitious, and better matched to the context and timeline, MESIP would likely have achieved even more***."

Caribbean: "*Given the significant amount of procurement that needed to happen,* ***there should have been a pre-implementation phase which would have given time and space to treat the administrative matters before the start of implementation****. Implementation of a project of this nature required additional human resources particularly in the area of procurement and finance to enhance efficiency*."

Uganda: "***Assessing institutional capacity*** at the central and district government levels is ***critical for designing an adequate and implementation timeline and setting realistic targets***."

Guinea: "***Improved institutional capacity at all levels is key to smooth implementation***, achievement of results, and sustainability of interventions in the education sector."

Reflections on a Holistic Value for Money Analysis

This section attempts to provide reflections on why it might be beneficial to have a more holistic approach in assessing value for money (VfM), one that relates not just to program efficiency but also to efficacy in achieving learning and access related outcomes.

Earlier sections in this chapter show that the two primary approaches to analyze VfM used in completion reports are cost-benefit analysis and unit cost analysis. However, both these approaches have limitations: without any discussion of the effectiveness or cost-effectiveness of interventions chosen, they don't inform us much about overall potential efficiency gains in learning or access. The chapter on efficacy shows that in general

learning objectives tend to be rated modest (either because they fell short of the target, the achievement of the target could not be attributed to the program interventions or it is unclear there was a sufficient achievement). When learning or access objectives fall short, of course implementation of interventions could be an issue, but the types of interventions being chosen relative to context and system diagnostics should be examined. In particular, we observe in the Economic Analysis in Completion Reports section that CBAs, when reported, tend to show higher rates of return (compared to the discount rates), yet not all of the programs tend to deliver on learning objectives as expected as reported in the chapter on efficacy. So in assessing VfM more holistically, perhaps there might be a need to reflect on the value of a CBA type of exercise that shows a high return but learning objectives realized are rated modest.

Stepping back from program efficiency analysis at completion to determine cost-effectiveness in use of program resources, a related yet broader question is about the effectiveness or cost-effectiveness of the interventions and programs chosen in generating gains in access and learning in countries—that is, to what extent the interventions included in a program are chosen based on existing evidence in their effectiveness in generating improvements in learning or access.[46] This has implications for both efficacy and efficiency. The growing evidence base on the cost-effectiveness of different interventions in generating increases in learning and access can be combined with the context and diagnostics of specific countries to inform the choice of interventions and programs.[47] Therefore, in a more holistic framework to assess VfM, a case can be made for a closer examination of interventions because it is likely to have implications not only for greater program efficiency (in attempting to achieve higher VfM than projects are currently achieving), but also for greater efficacy gains in learning and access, which are the final outcomes that governments and donors care about.

Going forward, a more holistic approach to assess VfM might be to focus on the following areas: (a) right intervention: the types of interventions chosen, whether there is evidence on their effective or cost-effectiveness in improving outcomes (learning or access) in low- and middle-income country settings, and whether these are according to local diagnostics and adapted to context; (b) right pricing of inputs: to what extent inputs in the chosen intervention are obtained at least cost; and (c) right implementation: how efficiently the interventions are implemented.

46. See appendix 11 for a quick review of the types of interventions chosen for the 18 programs with independent ratings available.
47. See, for example, Evans and Fei, "What We Learn about Girls' Education from Interventions That Don't Focus on Girls"; Ganimian and Murnane, "Improving Education in Developing Countries: Lessons from Rigorous Impact Evaluations"; and Glewwe and Muralidharan, "Improving School Education Outcomes in Developing Countries: Evidence, Knowledge," among others.

6. THEORY OF CHANGE AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK — TWO CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Theory of change and results framework are two critical tools that facilitate evidence-based planning and monitoring.[48] As monitoring and evaluation have been found to be foundational in supporting and measuring the achievement of program objectives (see chapter 4), we checked availability of a theory of change and a results framework in program application documents and completion reports and synthesized findings related to these two elements from the Independent Evaluation Group's (IEG) assessments of World Bank completion reports in the Implementation Completion and Results Report Reviews (ICRRs).

The theory of change is typically a schematic display that shows plausible relationships between the inputs, outputs and the desired outcome. It often identifies any underlying critical assumptions that must be in place for the intervention to be successful. The results framework, on the other hand, is a matrix that specifies the indicators for each level and sets out the baseline and the target for each indicator. Used together, these two tools not only help ensure there are sufficient interventions to achieve expected outcome, but also accurately estimate how long it will take to achieve the outcome and how much of the outcome is likely to be achieved in the program design stage. They also help course-correct during implementation and in understanding why and how desired outcomes were or were not achieved at completion.[49]

All programs, both World Bank and non–World Bank, have a results framework in their application documents.[50] Most results frameworks include statements of outcomes and outputs, indicators, baselines (where available) and targets. All programs include a results framework in their completion report, too.[51] This is a significant improvement from the previous Completion Report Review in 2019, which found 9 out of 36 programs reviewed did not have a formal results framework.

48. There are other similar conceptual tools also designed to organize information regarding intended outcomes and results, such as results chain, logic model, log frame, and so forth.
49. Independent Evaluation Group, *Designing a Results Framework for Achieving Results: A How-To Guide* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012).
50. Or they have a similar tool, such as a log frame.
51. The completion reports for Zambia and Tanzania (Mainland) indicate that the reports had results framework attachments; however, they were not available in the GPE Secretariat's record.

However, there are some weaknesses in the quality of the results frameworks. The ICRRs provide detailed assessments of the quality of a program's results framework. The most mentioned shortcoming is the lack of indicators monitoring key aspects of the program, which can be a reason for the modest rating for some program objectives (see chapter 4). There are many issues around the indicators included in the results framework, too, including their appropriateness to measure the desired results and the lack of baseline value or disaggregation, which made it difficult to measure improvements achieved during the implementation.

In terms of the theory of change, 20 out of 26 programs included a theory of change in the completion report, but only 6 included it in the program documents. The most frequently mentioned issues around the theory of change in IEG's reviews for World Bank grants are weak linkage or disconnect between outputs and higher-level results and lack of interventions to achieve specific objective. The lack of interventions is one of the main causes of nonachievement of objectives (see chapter 4). Inclusion of a theory of change, which considers all key aspects of program design and interventions, in the program documents and scrutiny of its quality during the quality assurance processes may mitigate the issue.

7. LESSONS LEARNED AND POTENTIAL AREAS FOR ACTION

- The findings of this review highlight the challenges of improving learning outcomes within the lifespan of the programs and/or measuring the improvement in learning outcomes. Further research is needed to better understand key aspects of programs that met learning outcome targets and those that did not or had difficulties in measuring the learning progress. Analysis could include an assessment of the interventions used to achieve improved learning outcomes (for example, the evidence base used to select the intervention, whether there was a pilot to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention prior to the program, operational characteristics of the successful interventions) and a comparison of the level of ambition in setting learning targets. The GPE Secretariat is now working on a stocktake in this regard, specifically focusing on the foundational learning.

- The findings of this review reaffirm that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is fundamental to measure success of any program. Modest performance ratings are not only because the programs fell short of target but also because there were issues with data and

measurement. At the same time, a strong M&E system is also mentioned as a success factor for supporting program objectives that achieved their targets. The Secretariat may need to consider identifying key facets of good M&E design and establishing more robust standards for assessing M&E aspects in program documents, including but not limited to the availability and quality of the results framework and theory of change, to help partner countries identify appropriate measurements, indicators and targets. These standards can be shared with grant agents and be used by the Secretariat in assessing the application documents submitted by grant agents.

- It is important to ensure that lessons learned from a closed grant are used in the design of a subsequent grant in the same country, particularly to prevent the same implementation challenges (for example, procurement) occurring in the new grant. As the completion report of the closed grant may not be available when country partners are preparing for the new grant, there should be other learning opportunities available for country partners in the early stage of new grant preparation. These opportunities should be embedded in the processes leading to programing of a new grant. The Secretariat may consider including a brief description of implementation challenges in the closed grant in its quality assurance checklist for the new grant.

- Evidence suggests that delays in the early stages of program implementation are a warning sign of a longer program period, but most grant agents don't immediately request an extension or revision because they still have time to complete the activities. When programs face delays in the early stages (for example, because of an external factor or a delayed start of program implementation), there needs to be a realistic risk assessment and effective course-correction measures. The Secretariat may consider introducing grant monitoring tools (for example, monitoring marker) to enable agile and proactive monitoring to support grant agents in this regard. It would also be useful for grant agents to strengthen risk tracking, specifically for activities that are more difficult to implement, and prepare an alternative plan for these activities.

- Procurement was and has always been the biggest bottleneck in implementation. The nature of the procurement challenges and their mitigation measures varied, depending on the grant agent and their procurement modality. The most frequent challenge for World Bank programs, which typically procure goods and services using partner country government systems, was capacity constraint, such as lack of procurement staff or staff with good technical and administrative knowledge and bandwidth. Closed grants facing procurement problems typically provided capacity building support to overcome delays, suggesting the need for a more rigorous assessment of procurement capacity and arrangement in the preparation stage. Alternatively, the most efficient way of procuring goods and services in the country

may be sought, while investing in enhancement in procurement capacity in the long term. For non–World Bank grants, particularly when procurement was done directly by the grant agent, political instability was more frequently mentioned as a cause of procurement delay than capacity constraints. The Secretariat may also consider procurement challenges in the closed grant in the same country when assessing the application document.

- Flexibilities allowed to grant agents to revise original program design—by extending the program implementation period, reallocating the budget, revising the indicators and targets as appropriate—enabled them to adapt the program to address evolving situations in the country and respond to the emergencies. This points to greater flexibility, longer implementation period and realistic target setting as key for successful and timely implementation. The Secretariat may consider conducting further analysis on the effectiveness of program revision and appropriateness of standard program duration (four years) to help realize system transformation.

- There is growing international evidence available on effective and cost-effective interventions to increase access and improve learning outcome. While what works may differ depending on country context, the Secretariat may facilitate countries' consideration of cost-effective and evidence-based interventions at the country level to support VfM.

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