JUNE 4-6, 2024 – MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, BERLIN, GERMANY

BOD/2024/06 DOC 04 – FOR DECISION

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES (FORMERLY STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES)

Please note: In accordance with the GPE Transparency Policy, documents are public only after their appraisal by the relevant governance instance. Governance officials may circulate documents to their constituency for consultation purposes, except for documents of a confidential nature.

Key issues for consideration:

- The Performance, Impact and Learning Committee (PILC) welcomed the progress on the initiatives and the potential for scaling their impact with co-financing. Members emphasized the need to ensure coherence with other financial mechanisms such as the Girls' Education Accelerator.
- PILC members also requested more information to be provided to the Board on the rationale for reallocating part of the funds from the original Strategic Capabilities provision to the Girls' Education Accelerator and the Multiplier. This information has been added to Annex C.
- The Finance and Risk Committee (FRC) recommended the proposed allocation to support scaling-up these initiatives. A precondition for co-financing recommended by the Secretariat has been removed by both Committees following discussion in April.

Objective

1. The Board is requested to consider an expansion of strategic capabilities, in view of a progress update and potential for co-financing.
2. The Board is also requested to confirm the availability of US$13 million to allocate to existing technical assistance initiatives as well as a delegation of authority to the CEO to approve those funds pending further details such as their intended use, and early results of pilots.

Recommended decision

BOD/2024/06-XX—Strategic Capabilities: The Board of Directors:

1. In accordance with BOD/2023/06/04, takes note of the update on progress and potential co-financing for the technical assistance initiatives portfolio, as set out in Annex A and Annex B of the BOD/2024/06 DOC 04 and confirms support to expand the initiatives subject to initial results of pilots.
2. Recommends the conditional approval of up to US$13 million for strategic capabilities, including US$5 million for the Climate Smart Education System Initiative, and up to US$2 million each for the Gender Equality, Safe Learning, School Nutrition, and Tech4Ed Initiatives, and encourages matching co-financing by October 2024.

3. Delegates authority to the CEO to approve the funding pending further details on their intended use, and implementation progress by October 2024.
4. Determines that the Technical Assistance Initiatives are eligible mechanisms for donors to target new and additional contributions that may increase the overall resources available.

Background and overview

1. In 2020, the Board approved US$2 million (BOD/2020/11/12-03) to test the approach and in 2023 another US$19 million (BOD/2023/06/04) to finance 5 initiatives: Climate Smart Education Systems (US$15 million), Gender Equality (US$1 million), Safe Learning (US$1 million), School Nutrition (US$1 million), and Technology for Education (US$1 million). This paper proposes to allocate an additional US$13 million for Strategic Capabilities.
2. The **Climate Smart Education System Initiative** is successfully expanding to reach 22 countries in 2024. Co-financing has been secured from Japan and the Green Climate Fund. Demand from countries is very strong and needs currently outweigh resources available. The allocation of an additional US$5 million is proposed to enable the program to include all 21 eligible Small Island Developing States rather than only a subset, increase allocations to sub-national authorities in Federal States and deepen capacity support at sub-national levels. These resources will also enable greater focus on cross-country learning. This funding is proposed to be approved by the CEO based on a detailed proposal. Additional details may be found in Annex A.
3. **Gender Equality, Safe Learning, School Nutrition and Technology for Education Initiative proposals** are all expected to be approved by the CEO by Q1 FY25 and are beginning to roll out support to 8 pilot countries. All initiatives have strong potential to mobilize co-financing to expand the pilot phase to additional countries to generate more learning, and the Secretariat is therefore proposing that an additional US$2 million be allocated to each of these initiatives, with the decision delegated to the CEO to approve detailed proposals for how these funds will be used. Further details on these initiatives are provided in Annex B.
4. The remaining US$6 million from the original provision of $40 million for Strategic Capabilities will be reallocated to cover immediate needs in the Girls' Education Accelerator and Multiplier grants. A rationale for this is provided in Annex C.

Annex A - Overview of Climate Smart Education System Initiative
Annex B - Gender Equality, Safe Learning, School Nutrition, and Tech4Ed Initiatives and allocation of resources
Annex C – Rationale for the reallocation of resources

Annex A - Overview of Climate Smart Education System Initiative

1. **Background.** The Climate Smart Education Systems Initiative (CSESI) was launched following Board approval (BOD/2020/11/12-03) to commence implementation of the 'strategic capabilities' modality (also called *technical assistance initiatives*). GPE partner countries, which are among the most vulnerable and hardest hit by climate change, requested the Secretariat to design an initiative to address climate impacts on education systems. In response, the Secretariat issued a competitive call for expressions of interest from GPE grant agents and allocated US$946,000 to a consortium of UNESCO, UNESCO-IIEP and Save the Children to lead the design and test the implementation of the Climate Smart Education System Initiative in Zimbabwe and Malawi.

2. The initiative aims to support countries' capacities to mainstream climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability into education sector plans, budgets and strategies as well as to enhance education ministry capacity for cross-sectoral coordination on climate and environment-related policy and programming. Specifically, the Initiative offers support on: (1) Evidence-based policies and planning; (2) Cross-sector and internal coordination; (3) Access to climate finance; (4) Climate data and evidence for education planning; (5) Safer and greener infrastructure; (6) School safety and educational continuity; and (7) Curricula, pedagogy and teacher training. A GPE-wide partner country consultation informed the design of the pilot initiative, including a dedicated co-creation space at the December 2022 and March 2023 GPE Africa and Asia-Pacific Constituency meetings, as well as co-creation webinars and a GPE survey.

3. **Progress on the pilot phase.** As this initiative is rooted in country demand and is tailored to each countries' realities and policy cycles, the contextualization of this support for Malawi and Zimbabwe started with inception missions. GPE and initiative partners met in June 2023 with key stakeholders in both countries (Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change, multiple departments within the Ministry of Education (MoE)/Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), civil society (CSEC and ECOZI), local education groups, etc.). Findings were captured in an inception report outlining where each country stands in the areas covered by the initiative, and ministries signaled their priorities for capacity strengthening support.

4. In Zimbabwe, the partnership compact priority is "Improved Equitable Access to Quality Relevant Education", and the ministry has signaled improvement of schools' resilience and disaster risk management as one of the means to achieve it. In line with this systemic priority, this Initiative is supporting Zimbabwe to (1) strengthen climate change, disaster risk reduction, and education for sustainable development in the ongoing curriculum review process and learning materials; (2) identify and

evaluate the main climate change stressors in the country, and analyze the current capacities of MoPSE to lessen the impact of these to ensure learning continuity; (3) integrate climate change into school design standards; (4) streamline climate smart indicators through existing data collection; (5) provide a roadmap for access to climate finance and inclusion of education in the forthcoming GCF strategy; and (6) strengthen crosscutting inter-ministerial coordination to ensure the inclusion of education in UNFCCC processes and climate finance pipeline.

5. In Malawi policy dialogue is strongly surfacing the need for support following severe impacts of recent cyclones on education provision. The compact states that the Initiative will serve as a foundation for integrating climate considerations into Malawi's educational system, including school management practices, climate resilient infrastructure and continuity planning at sub-national and school levels, curriculum revisions, teacher training, and data and info management. The initiative partners are therefore providing timely technical assistance to: (1) develop a climate risk analysis for the education sector; (2) develop a consolidated climate change strategy for the education sector; (3) support the inclusion of education measures in the forthcoming National Adaptation Plan; (4) assist with the integration of climate change into education sector coordination mechanisms and the education sector into climate change coordination mechanisms; (5) define a roadmap to access climate finance; (6) identify, review and strengthen climate-related data access and collection tools, including the annual school census survey; and (7) to integrate and layer the competencies related to climate change and sustainability into curriculum at primary and secondary levels.

6. As pilots in Malawi and Zimbabwe were starting, the distinctive value proposition of this initiative became clear and strong demand to extend this support to more countries across the partnership led to the approval of additional finance. In June 2023, the Board approved an additional US$15 million to scale the initiative to an additional 18-20 countries and delegated approval of country-specific grants to the GPE CEO (BOD/2023/06-04).

7. **Partnership with the Green Climate Fund.** As part of wider dialogue with key actors in the climate sector throughout the design phase of the Climate Smart Education System Initiative, the GPE Secretariat and Save the Children identified a significant opportunity to link technical assistance to larger climate finance efforts. Although minimal climate finance has flowed to increase the education sector's climate resilience, the advent of recent guidance for the education sector (for e.g., the *Climate Smart Education System Framework* and *Comprehensive School Safety Framework*) has helped to draw explicit linkages to climate adaptation agendas. In an effort to accelerate climate adaptation in education, GPE together with the Green

Climate Fund and Save the Children launched the BRACE program at Cop28, an unprecedented investment to build climate-resilient schools in vulnerable countries. The initiative aims to build safer and greener schools, embed climate change in school curricula; warn schools about climate events and improve early action beginning in Cambodia, South Sudan and Tonga.

8. Importantly, the BRACE initiative builds on and incorporates the Climate Smart Education System Initiative to provide an on-ramp in support of country readiness to access climate finance. As part of BRACE, the Climate Smart Education System Initiative will support the development of a pipeline for climate grants in an additional 20 countries, in conjunction with the wider range of technical assistance support on offer. For e.g., the Climate Smart Education System Initiative offers Ministries of Education a resource mobilization roadmap for tapping into different sources of climate finance, including Green Climate Fund financing, to support their education resilience and sustainability priorities.

9. Finally, BRACE focuses on global coordination, knowledge and learning through a Climate and Education Finance Coordination and Learning mechanism. This effort to build expertise across the sector about good practice, effective interventions and coherent methodologies for climate finance programming and monitoring in education will draw on the experience of countries involved in the Climate Smart Education System Initiative.

10. **Progress on scaling.** Following the approval of US$15 million to scale the technical assistance initiative last June, Save the Children, UNESCO and UNESCO-IIEP have established the necessary staffing, coordination, governance and implementation structures to ensure successful delivery of the Initiative to a larger number of countries. The GPE Secretariat has worked closely with the initiative partners to design the roll-out process in alignment with other country processes, mainstreaming gender, ensuring clear monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) and reporting frameworks, confirming countries interest and availability to participate, and considering specific approaches for Federal states and regional groupings of countries. The scale-up follows a cohort model that adds 2-3 countries per quarter beginning in January 2024, and that has at its core a learning and adapting approach.

11. South Sudan and Cambodia were invited to join cohort 1, selected to provide proof of concept in both Asia and Africa regions as part of the BRACE program (*"Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities through the Education Sector"*), which brings significant complementarity to the Climate Smart Education System Initiative. Inception missions to both countries took place in February 2024 with multi-stakeholder consultations to inform the priorities for support under the technical

assistance initiative. As in the case of Zimbabwe and Malawi, the national priorities for technical assistance in Cambodia and South Sudan, endorsed by the ministry of education and local education group, will be captured in country-specific grants which are then approved by the GPE CEO.

12. The scale-up of support is benefitting from lessons learned in Malawi and Zimbabwe to improve efficiency and alignment of the support. The initiative partners will continue to adapt and improve the process as it is expanded. Process adaptations and efficiencies are also being documented cyclically through learning and reflection moments and captured as part of the initiative MEL strategy.

13. One of the key lessons emerging from the roll out is that the resource envelope is a modest one in the face of enormous climate challenges in this cohort of the most vulnerable countries. Initial needs identified in Malawi and Zimbabwe had to be severely prioritized to match a US$700,000 budget, while capacity gaps at sub-national level have been omitted. Federal states, for e.g. in Pakistan, have a per-country allocation which does not adequately accommodate the needs at provincial level (which have comparatively larger populations than some countries). In addition, the urgency of needs in 21 Small Island Developing States has led to their inclusion as a whole rather than selecting a sub-set with whom to work, which has put pressure on the budget for regional approaches. Based on the scale of needs within already-eligible countries, the initiative has a strong absorptive capacity and potential to improve the depth, breadth and quality of its support.

14. **Additional finance.** During the Board meeting in June 2023, a dedicated deep dive session around climate change and education took place, which confirmed the shared view that additional action was needed. Following this discussion, Japan became the first country to step up to this challenge and pledged support of US$2,418,101 through its contribution to the GPE Fund to increase education's resilience to climate change in sub-Saharan Africa through the Climate Smart Education Systems Initiative. Recognizing the opportunity to reinforce the approach across the whole portfolio, enabling larger budgets to support countries and include more dedicated support for Small Island Developing States, it is therefore proposed to allocate an additional US$5 million to enable the expansion of this program, inclusive of the Japanese contribution. The Initiative partners will develop a proposal for the allocation of this additional amount to the program, to be approved by the GPE CEO.

15. This additional support will also allow a stronger focus on learning, with a focus on cross-country and peer-to-peer learning. As implementation of technical assistance advances, initiative partners will be able to convene more substantial learning moments and GPE will also leverage its own platforms (Knowledge & Innovation Exchange hubs, partner country constituency meetings, Board and Committee

meetings) to enable experience-sharing among partners both within and beyond the initial pool of eligible countries. In conjunction with an expected investment of US$42 million in Green Climate Fund implementation finance and potentially more from an emergent Green Climate Fund pipeline, the learning agenda will be a significant tool to inform transformational practice in the climate and education nexus beyond the countries directly eligible for the initiative.

Annex B - Gender Equality, Safe Learning, School Nutrition, and Tech4Ed Initiatives

1. **Background.** As part of GPE 2025, the Board authorized the development of a new approach called "strategic capabilities" to enable the GPE Secretariat to leverage the expertise, resources and tools of partnerships to address common capacity challenges. Board principles state that they must: (1) reinforce partner country capacity for system transformation; (2) be demand-driven and evidence-based; (3) be transaction light and comply with GPE principles and policies; (4) be deployed only when there are demonstrable efficiencies or other benefits; (5) avoid duplication and leverage existing partnership assets, national, regional or global expertise.
2. **Thematic selection.** Following country surveys, regional constituency discussion groups, and an indicative poll of country demand, several themes emerged as critical to making progress in the achievement of equitable quality education. While most challenges within the education system are best and most efficiently served by existing country grants (system capacity grants in particular, among others), a range of cross-sectoral challenges emerged from this consultation which require aligned and coordinated action across multiple ministries. These issues center *child well-being* as crucial to positive education outcomes; where children's experience of gender discrimination, chronic hunger, violence in and around schools, climate risks, and the disadvantage of a growing digital divide pose unique challenges for education ministries. By mobilizing partnerships to work at the intersection of education and child well-being, the portfolio aims to bring a more holistic approach to reinforce the enabling environment for successful education outcomes. All initiatives include both mainstreamed and targeted gender equality measures, including the capacity of partners to integrate gender into on-going activities.
3. **Pilot countries** for all initiatives were selected based on specific criteria related to: country ownership and commitment (evidenced by political endorsements, national policy initiatives, etc.) timing of support relative to other in-country processes (including the roll out of the GPE operating model), capacity of the partners to cover that country (where their country offices or staff have the required skills), and the potential of pilots to generate learning to inform the wider approaches under consideration. This was cross-checked across the portfolio to ensure diversity of regional representation in proportion to the geographic weight of GPE's member

countries as a whole, and factoring in countries facing fragility and violence to ensure more challenging environments were included. Country eligibility during the scale up phase of each initiative will be based on prioritization criteria to ensure a consistent and transparent methodology is applied across all partner countries – for example eligibility for the Climate Smart Education System Initiative was prioritized for most climate vulnerable low-income countries (across 5 different indices) in each region, with provision for all Small Island Developing States given their unique geographic exposure to climate risks.

Gender Equality

4. The Gender Equality Initiative is currently pending CEO approval, with collaboration among GPE Secretariat, and Gender at the Center Initiative (GCI) partners UNESCO-IIEP Dakar and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) well advanced and agreement with the Ministries of Education in Chad and Cote d'Ivoire to participate in the pilot. The initiative, building on the GCI, aims to reinforce national education systems and strengthen sectoral dialogue so that gender equality is fully and effectively mainstreamed in and through education. Support envisaged includes strengthening capacity (1) of Ministries of Education and national education actors to develop strong gender-responsive education sector policies, plans and budgets; and (2) amongst Ministries of Education, local education groups, civil society and young activists to engage actively in inclusive dialogue on gender-transformative education.

5. The initiative is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2024 and will align with on-going gender-focused efforts in Chad and Cote d'Ivoire. In both countries, gender equality is a key objective within their partnership compacts and will be aligned with the implementation of system transformation grants and Girls' Education Accelerator grants. The Gender Equality Initiative will support the ministries to map the interventions and identify the need to strengthen their expertise within their gender directorates. In this regard, an initial inception phase will better outline the existing efforts of the ministries, other development partners in country, and remaining gaps that could be supported by the GCI partners.

6. By accompanying the GPE process and gender dimensions of compacts and GPE finance, the GCI partners can also help support GPE's approach to gender as set out by GPE's operational paper "Going Further Together: A partnership approach to Gender Equality" through its next strategic period. The GPE Secretariat is also exploring opportunities for GCI to expand support to additional countries where gaps in capacity are identified via the GPE operating model implementation. Additional scale may be reached through lighter touch efforts to share tools and experience across countries and provide targeted support focused on specific needs for

countries (particularly those with a limited number of development partners with technical capacity in situ). This may also be possible by enabling the GCI partners to add value and fill gaps through the system capacity grants.

7. In early 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France confirmed its intent to provide co-financing for GCI, as a response to the call from GPE to co-finance its technical assistance initiatives portfolio.

Safe Learning

8. The Safe Learning Initiative, which seeks to build country capacity to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools, was approved in February 2024 by the CEO. The offer of capacity support coordinated by the Safe to Learn Initiative, which will be contextualized based on the specific priorities and needs in Nepal and Sierra Leone, includes: (1) technical capacity aimed at ensuring that national policies and legislative frameworks embed violence prevention and response, in education sector planning, budgeting, reporting, and monitoring; (2) advisory services to strengthen prevention and response at the school level; (3) guidance on the use of social and behavior change approaches to address drivers of violence in schools and enable a supportive learning environment; (4) support to ministries of education at national and subnational levels to strengthen appropriate budgeting and costing, and development of results indicators for violence prevention and response; and (5) capacity support to generate and learn from evidence on the prevalence of and drivers of violence against children, and what works to address it.

9. In both Nepal and Sierra Leone, UNICEF country offices (with support from regional offices and the Safe to Learn Secretariat), will provide technical assistance across education, child protection, and social and behavior change, and support the ministries of education on the advancement of efforts linked to the government-approved priority objectives for the Safe Learning Initiative. This GPE investment initiative can support these countries to translate their strong policy frameworks into scalable models at local government level, and into practices at the school level, with a stronger gender lens. With the application of proven frameworks for diagnosing policy and legislative gaps and accompanied technical assistance to structure inter-ministerial efforts more coherently, progress could be rapidly accelerated.

10. Significant momentum is growing in this area and in January 2024, GPE, United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Center for Global Development, the Coalition for Good Schools and Safe to Learn convened a conference at Wilton Park which highlighted the strong consensus among partner governments, donors, civil society, foundations and youth that investments are needed to end violence in and through education. GPE is working with these partners

to continue the dialogue on violence in schools, through key moments such as the Education World Forum in May.

School Nutrition

11. GPE has worked with the World Food Program to complete the design of the School Nutrition Initiative and confirmed the interest of Kenya and Lesotho to participate in the pilot. The initiative aims to ensure that countries have increasingly sustainable, gender-responsive and nationally owned school meal programs, providing schoolchildren with safe, diverse, nutritious foods that are locally purchased. The initiative aims to increase capacity to secure more sustainable financing for school meals policies and programs (both domestic and international), support governments to increase food quality and safety standards, as well as other relevant national strategies and laws, support the environmental sustainability of school meals programs, improve linkages between local supply chains and schools, develop gender action plans, increase capacity for multi-sectoral coordination, and improve monitoring of school health and nutrition.

12. While the approach and its implementation arrangements are nearly finalized, the approval of this pilot was contingent upon the WFP's accreditation as a grant agent. As this is still under negotiation, it is not yet certain that WFP will be able to act as the fiduciary agent for this program and contingency plans are being made to find an alternate grant agent so that implementation can begin as soon as possible.

13. In tandem, GPE has been in discussions with the Rockefeller Foundation which is in the early stages of designing a large program for school nutrition which includes a core component focusing on strengthening capacity of governments around policy, finance and data for which there is considerable synergy with GPE's approach. GPE has therefore joined the Steering Committee for the "Big Bet for Planet Friendly School Meals" (NovoNordisk Foundation, WFP, Sustainable Finance Initiative, Brazilian Center for Excellence, and others) which is undertaking a design process throughout this year to define a comprehensive approach aiming to reach ~100 million additional children with school nutrition by 2030. Given the potential for GPE's School Nutrition initiative to leverage this wider effort and advance the design, testing and learning phase of the Big Bet, GPE's School Nutrition initiative over the next 18 months will inform the long-term implementation potential of this collective effort by 2030, including GPE's role.

Technology for Education

14. In collaboration with UNICEF and the EdTech Hub, GPE has completed the design of the Tech4Ed Initiative and confirmed the interest of Ghana and Tajikistan to participate in the pilot. The initiative aims to ensure that Ministries of Education benefit

from 1) Strengthened capacity to effectively identify and leverage adequate tools and resources to integrate technology across their education system; 2) Strengthened ability to leverage technology to facilitate the provision of timely and relevant data for education planning and management; 3) Better positioning to lead and coordinate cross-sectoral strategies (including with Ministries of Information and Communications Technology(ICT)), policies, programs and financing on Tech4Ed; and 4) Continued evidence mobilization of what, how and why technology works for education; and ministries of education are equipped to generate and use evidence on how to effectively leverage tech to strengthen education systems.

15. The Tech4Ed Initiative will offer targeted support to countries with the intent of scaling up technology for education, and a more thorough assessment and integration of technology in education strategic and operational plans. Opportunities for evidence-based learning and peer exchange will be privileged; and it is expected that cross-sectoral coordination on ICT, including Ministry of ICT or country equivalent, private sector and non-profit EdTech actors, development partners engaging on EdTech, will be strengthened.

16. The Tech4Ed Initiative is aligned with other global and regional initiatives, plans, frameworks and approaches, including the Digital Transformation Collaborative. It is expected that learning from the experience in Tajikistan and Ghana will inform GPE's the development of a scalable model for on-demand Tech4Ed technical advisory services to other GPE partner countries; and the identification of engagement opportunities with private and philanthropic EdTech actors.

Additional Resources

17. The provision of an additional $2 million each for the pilot initiatives was predicated on the view that up to $2 million could be mobilized from co-financing as a matching challenge. While the Committees have determined to remove the condition of co-financing from this allocation, $2 million per initiative will nonetheless permit a useful expansion of the pilot phase to add 2-4 diverse countries per initiative from which GPE can learn. This additional finance will also enable a stronger emphasis on learning dissemination from the pilots. An evaluation of the technical assistance initiative portfolio as a whole is planned in the second half of 2025 which will inform any future decisions of the GPE Board to continue its support.

Annex C - Rationale for the reallocation of resources

1. While the Board never approved an overall envelope for strategic capabilities (now technical assistance initiatives), the Secretariat included a provision of US$40 million in the financial forecast for planning purposes.

2. The PILC and FRC requested further information on the rationale for recommending an additional US$13 million rather than US$19 million. The Secretariat considered the following issues:

    a. the Board has never formally approved an overall allocation level for these initiatives. Therefore, additional funds are being made available rather than a cut in any pre-approved allocation amount.

    b. There is a compelling need to find resources to meet demonstrated demand from partner countries that have had strategic parameters for the Girls' Education Accelerator already approved by the Board but lack funding, and from Multiplier countries that have submitted valid expressions of interest demonstrating they have identified additional co-financing to unlock the Multiplier if funds were made available.

    c. The increase of US$5 million to the Climate Smart Education Initiative recognizes the scale of this initiative and that it is substantially more advanced compared to the other four initiatives which started later.

    d. The proposed increase from US$1 million to US$3 million for the remaining four initiatives recognizes that they're at early stages of development of a pilot and the funds available will allow a reasonable level of scale up during the pilot phase before the end of the current financing period which will end in just 18 months' time.

    e. The Board over the coming 12 months will have an opportunity to consider the financing and funding framework for the 2026-2030 period including the future of these initiatives and the amount of funds if any that should be made available.