Executive Summary

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is a multilateral global partnership established in 2002 as the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA/FTI). The Partnership seeks to strengthen national education plans, improve aid effectiveness, coordinate donor support, and galvanize financing to achieve the Education for All goals. Today the Global Partnership comprises 60 developing country partners (DCPs), more than 30 bilateral and multilateral donor and development agencies, as well as civil society organizations, private sector bodies, and philanthropic foundations.

In March 2014, the GPE Board commissioned the Universalia Management Group Ltd and Results for Development Institute (R4D) to conduct an interim evaluation covering the period 2010 -2014. The overarching question that the interim evaluation was asked to explore was how the organizational changes since 2010 have improved the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Partnership.

Data collection took place between September 2014 and April 2015 and included: document review, interviews with 59 GPE Secretariat staff, Board members, and global thought leaders, and with 418 country-level stakeholders; surveys of GPE Secretariat staff (44 responded) and global GPE partners (110 responded); site visits to eight countries and virtual visits (conducted by telephone and Skype) with stakeholders in ten countries.

Evaluation findings deriving from this broad evidence form the basis for the following overall conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation found that the GPE Board and Secretariat have made serious efforts to address the recommendations of the 2010 evaluation and other areas for improvement identified since then. These changes have **strengthened the Partnership both operationally and strategically**.

However, the Partnership has not yet clearly defined what constitutes 'success' in view of its broad and ambitious mission; this has implications for the Partnership's future direction. **At present, there is a considerable disconnect between the Global Partnership's ambitious mission and its narrow financing base**. The GPE Board and Secretariat are likely to address this challenge as they develop the Strategic Plan for 2015-2020.

GPE at the Global Level

1: The Partnership has maintained its relevance in evolving global and national contexts by reformulating its strategic priorities, establishing indicative country allocations, and revising its funding criteria.

The Partnership's focus on basic education was relevant during the period reviewed and is likely to remain so under the new global Sustainable Development Goals. In its first Strategic Plan for 2012-2015, the Partnership clarified its strategic priorities and emphasized the importance of improving not only access to education, but also the quality of education. It also focused GPE resources more strategically on geographic areas most in need and least well-funded through other sources, including on fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). It adjusted its funding criteria to better serve all countries, and informed current and potential member countries of the maximum grant allocations for which they might be eligible. The Partnership also made progress towards

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consolidating GPE financing from all but one donor under a single GPE Fund while phasing out the previously established Catalytic Fund.

Together, these factors contributed to an additional 19 countries joining the Partnership since 2010, 16 of which are categorized as FCAS. GPE has also more than doubled its disbursements to FCAS and the largest share has gone to states categorized as fragile. While the growth in GPE membership is positive, the addition of population rich countries such as Pakistan has meant that mean GPE allocations per primary school aged child and per out of school child in DCPs have decreased since 2010.

2: The Partnership has insufficiently defined how it will translate its mission of "galvanizing and coordinating global efforts to deliver a good quality education" into practice. This has negatively affected its ability to demonstrate progress towards results.

While GPE Board members and Secretariat staff widely agree that the GPE is 'more than just a fund,' it is not clear what 'more' constitutes. This lack of clarity is reflected in the following:

- The absence of an overarching Theory of Change
- The absence of an agreed upon Results Framework
- The absence of a shared understanding of GPE's envisaged role and comparative advantage in advocating for education at the global level and in knowledge generation and dissemination
- The absence of an agreed-upon understanding of the size and role of the Secretariat
- The absence of a clear definition or framework explaining how GPE will leverage the strengths of its partners not only at the country, but also at the global level.

As a result, consulted stakeholders within and across the different constituencies have diverging views on what they consider evidence of the Partnership's success. Some focus on its ability to generate funding for basic education, while others are primarily interested in evidence of GPE contributions to education outcomes at the country level. Another consequence is that the Partnership has limited ability to track and demonstrate progress towards higher level results. The GPE Board and Secretariat acknowledge these weaknesses and expect they will be addressed in the new Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

While there is considerable pressure from at least one major GPE donor for a rigorous impact evaluation of the Partnership, the feasibility of such an evaluation will be affected by the current deficiencies in the Partnership's ability to clearly define, monitor, and demonstrate progress towards results, and the absence of a counterfactual.

3: Changes in GPE governance have had positive effects on the legitimacy and efficiency of the Board.

Since 2010 the GPE Board has become more representative, most notably in the participation of developing country partners. There is room for improvement in ensuring the participation of Southern civil society organizations, and in clarifying the rationale for involving private sector representatives and defining related selection criteria.

The four newly created Board committees have had some positive effects on Board efficiency, but could be used more effectively if they had some operational decision-making authority, which would allow the Board to focus more on strategic rather than operational matters.

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4: The GPE Board has insufficiently defined what it means to operate as a global partnership, and has not fully translated the principle of mutual accountability into practice.

The GPE Compact (2013) broadly defined the roles and responsibilities of different types of partners but it is not clear how the Partnership will leverage the strengths of individual partners. A Mutual Accountability Matrix was drafted in 2011 but never formally adopted or implemented.

The current partnership framework has not been used consistently to monitor partner compliance with non-financial commitments (such as harmonizing procedures) and, until recently, did not include any negative consequences for partners who did not honour their commitments. The new GPE Funding Model does stipulate consequences of non-compliance with financial commitments, but only for developing country partners.

5: There is no strong evidence yet of Partnership contributions to filling the financing gap for basic education.

The Partnership's ability to mobilize new external resources has been constrained by the overall global decline in aid to basic education since 2009. To strengthen resource mobilization, the GPE Secretariat introduced and held two pledging conferences (in 2011 and 2014) but pledges and actual contributions from donors have fallen short of envisaged targets. Furthermore, even if the pledge goals were reached, the financing gaps would remain sizeable: the average annual financing gap (between available domestic resources and the amount needed to reach post-2015 targets) across all low and lower-middle income countries between 2015 and 2030 is estimated to be US$ 22 billion.

There is considerable evidence that existing GPE financing is largely not additional to what would have been available without the Partnership. Some donors have reallocated some or all of their bilateral funding for basic education to the Partnership and IDA allocations to GPE countries decreased from US$ 500 million in 2007 to US$ 250 million in 2012.

Increases in domestic resources from developing country partners (DCPs) have been marginal and cannot be directly attributed to the influence of the Partnership. Many of the pledges made by DCPs at the 2011 Replenishment Conference were not fulfilled. At the 2014 Replenishment Conference, DCPs pledged US$ 26 billion, some of which, if adhered to, would represent new but modest resources for education.

6: There is a severe mismatch between the Partnership's broad and ambitious mission on the one hand and its limited financial resources and ability to systematically leverage the strengths of its partners on the other hand.

GPE members and external partners see the Partnership's considerable geographic reach and diverse governance as positive assets in terms of its credibility, legitimacy, and potential to convene partners and optimize their influence on global progress in basic education. Some stakeholders expect the Partnership to take stronger global leadership for the (sub)sector, but it is not yet seen to be filling this role.

This is due in part to the Partnership's limited resources. While GPE funding allocations have not yet addressed some underserved areas of basic education, such as adult and youth literacy, the Partnership is facing considerable pressure from some members and global stakeholders to expand its support e.g. to encompass secondary and/or higher education and education in humanitarian crisis situations. The financing required for such thematic expansions would be sizable.

In addition, the Partnership has not systematically leveraged the strengths of its partners to exert influence and contribute to global level results, such as generating and disseminating global public goods and strengthening the global visibility of education.

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GPE at the country level

In most of the countries reviewed for the interim evaluation, it is too early to assess the effects of GPE organizational changes since 2010. This is because some countries only joined the Partnership within the past five years, and countries that joined earlier have not yet undergone grant application and implementation processes before and after the reforms that would allow for meaningful comparisons. The following conclusions need to be understood against this backdrop.

7: Reforms implemented since 2010 have had some positive effects on GPE contributions to strengthening country capacity for education sector planning. Whether and how this will lead to improved education outcomes remains to be verified.

Although the Partnership is seen primarily as a funding mechanism at the country level, it is also valued for promoting evidence-based, participatory and inclusive sector planning processes. It has supported the development or revision of Education Sector Plans (ESPs) and related GPE-funded programs that address national priorities.

The Partnership has made financial contributions through grants, and technical and normative contributions through grant application criteria and participatory processes for ESP and grant proposal development. The GPE Secretariat has provided guidance for GPE grant application processes, reduced processing time, and provided more direct support to DCPs for their grant applications including through more frequent country visits. GPE partners have provided support by acting as Supervising/Managing Entities and Coordinating Agencies.

Since 2010 the Partnership has put more emphasis on developing Local Education Groups (LEG) and has made contributions to diversifying their membership. LEGs have generally been actively involved in developing ESPs and GPE grant proposals, but are less involved during ESP and grant monitoring. The consistent and meaningful participation of civil society organizations and private sector representatives in LEGs is an ongoing challenge.

DCP representatives and LEG members in several countries, especially in FCAS, expressed the desire for more GPE technical assistance in ESP implementation and monitoring.

While some GPE donors are eager to see evidence of GPE contributions to education outcomes, there are practical and theoretical issues to be resolved. The practical issue is whether the Partnership can realistically make direct contributions to such outcomes given its financial resources. The theoretical issue is whether sound ESPs lead to improved learning outcomes – an assumption that has not yet been tested, and which relates to the Partnership's implicit Theory of Change.

8: The current uniform models for Supervising/Managing Entities and Coordinating Agencies are not fully aligned with the principles of national ownership and mutual accountability.

The Partnership is committed to furthering the Aid Effectiveness agenda. It has promoted ownership of GPE-funded interventions by either the national government or the LEG and has made notable contributions to enhancing harmonization and coordination among donors and education stakeholders at the country level.

The Partnership has expanded the number of agencies acting as Supervising Entities (SEs) and Managing Entities (MEs) (as of early 2015, there were 11) and UNICEF is now supervising 15% of active grant amounts. Nevertheless, GPE continues to rely heavily on the World Bank as an SE/ME. SEs and MEs have contributed to country-level processes, especially GPE grant application processes.

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Coordinating Agencies (CA) have provided valuable support, especially in the period leading up to GPE grant approval. However, the current CA model, which relies on donor agencies to take on this coordination function, may stifle rather than promote strong Local Education Groups in some countries.

The current models for Supervising/Managing Entities (SE/ME) and Coordinating Agencies (CA) are not fully aligned with the principles of national ownership and mutual accountability. Organizations fulfilling these roles are not accountable to the national governments or LEGs they work with, and the present model does not allow context-specific adaptations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are grouped according to the 'big picture' findings that emerged from the interim evaluation and accompanied by specific recommendations in each group. Of the four groups of recommendations, the first two are considered imperative, while the third and fourth are considered desirable.

Since the interim evaluation was conducted while the Partnership was developing the new GPE Strategic Plan, the GPE Board and/or Secretariat may already have taken, or be about to take, steps that address some of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The GPE Board should agree on where and how the Partnership aims to add value, what constitutes 'success' in view of its mission, and the types of results for which the Partnership can realistically hold itself accountable.

1.1 The GPE Secretariat, in collaboration with the Board, should continue to develop and finalize a theory of change (or one theory each for the global and the country level) that spells out the goals and objectives of the Partnership and the types of changes it intends to influence.

1.2 The GPE Board should decide the future directions of the Partnership's grant-making function in terms of thematic and geographic scope and priorities.

1.3 The GPE Board should decide whether the Partnership will continue to aspire to fill a global role beyond resource mobilization and grant-making, and, if so, what this role will be, how it will be implemented, and with what envisaged results.

1.4 The GPE Board should clearly articulate the value-added of being a partnership and how it will make use of the combined contributions of its partners to better fulfil its mission.

Recommendation 2: The Global Partnership should develop a Strategic Management Framework that is based on the new Strategic Plan and that includes a results framework, monitoring plan, formal feedback mechanisms, and an evaluation plan.

2.1 Based on the agreed Theory (or Theories) of Change, the GPE Secretariat should develop a Results Framework to define the Partnership's envisaged contributions to results.

2.2 The GPE Secretariat should develop a draft monitoring plan for Board approval to facilitate the use of the Results Framework.

2.3 The Global Partnership should develop formal feedback mechanisms to better monitor its performance as a partnership.

2.4 The GPE Board should reconsider the plan to conduct an Impact Evaluation, currently envisaged for 2017.

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2.5 The Secretariat should develop an evaluation plan that incorporates an independent external evaluation in or around 2020, as well as one or more periodic evaluations between 2016 and 2020.

Recommendation 3: The Global Partnership should further clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board Committees and the Secretariat.

3.1 The GPE Board should assign clearly defined decision-making powers to either the Coordinating Committee or to all of the other three committees (in which case it should dissolve the Coordinating Committee). This would allow operational decisions to be made in between biannual meetings of the full Board, and would allow the Board to focus primarily on strategic issues.

3.2 The Partnership should revisit and agree upon the nature and scope of the role that the Secretariat is expected to play at both global and national levels, and ensure that it has the resources to do so.

Recommendation 4: The GPE Secretariat should develop a proposal for review by the GPE Board on how to make Supervising Entity and Coordinating Agency arrangements more flexible and adaptable to varying national contexts.

This recommendation does not suggest abolishing the functions currently fulfilled by SE/ME and CA, but to explore whether in selected national contexts some or all of these functions can be fulfilled equally well by national actors. Where this is the case, transferring functions to these actors has the potential to enhance national ownership and capacity. This is reflected in the following specific recommendations.

4.1 The Secretariat, in consultation with DCPs, should explore other options for Supervising Entities.

4.2 The GPE Secretariat should explore whether in some countries there are alternative ways of ensuring the fulfilment of CA functions.

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