Appendix 3. Review of the Global and Regional Activities Program

Background

In November 2010, the then-FTI Board of Directors approved the concept for the Global and Regional Activities (GRA) Program. According to the presentation made at the Madrid Board Meeting, the purpose of the GRA was to "leverage the value added of the FTI Partnership by expanding and sharing education sector knowledge[80]." The GRA Program was designed to support research, capacity development and sharing of best practices at three levels: globally, regionally, and in countries. The predecessor to the GRA Program was the Education Program Development Fund (EPDF), a fund which, in addition to supporting the development of education sector plans, provided some support "for priority studies, capacity building, national outreach and stakeholder consultations."[81][82]

Implicit in the motivation for establishing the GRA was that, by leveraging the analytical abilities of its partners, GPE could help fill existing knowledge gaps that other actors have not been able to fill. Three such areas were identified: learning outcomes and quality, out-of-school children (OOSC) , and financing and systems building. Within each of these areas, the Secretariat identified specific areas that the program could address, as detailed in technical working papers developed by the GPE Secretariat, in consultation with partners. For example, the learning outcomes/quality paper placed a considerable emphasis on the dissemination of existing knowledge rather than simply the production of new knowledge, whereas the OOSC paper identified gaps in country data, policy and management, with attendant strategies for addressing such gaps through the GRA).

After identification of the three areas where GRA support could add particular value, the GPE Secretariat developed an operations manual detailing the policies and procedures for developing, implementing and monitoring of the program. The Operations Manual, which was approved in October 2012 after significant Board feedback, outlined six categories of eligible activities for funding: technical workshops, peer learning events, and conferences; development of innovative partnerships and networks; study tours; technical assistance; research and dissemination; and pilot interventions to address specific issues. Furthermore, the Operations Manual highlighted the need for the GRA grants to align with the objectives articulated in GPE's strategic plan, released in June 2012, as well as complement partners' ongoing country activities. The original allocation for the GRA program was $60 million.

In 2013, the Board of Directors approved funding for 16 GRA concept notes. The first batch, approved in February, elicited 12 proposals, with eight chosen. This batch had a focus on GPE Strategic Goal 3 – learning outcomes – and Strategic Goal 5 – education financing, and totaled more than $13 million, with most grants targeting Francophone Africa. The second batch, approved in July, placed a particular emphasis on priorities and goals not addressed in the first batch -- namely teachers, out-of-school children, and girls education – and broadened the geographic reach of the program, with regional foci in East Asia and the Pacific, Western and Central Africa, and Central Asia. Eight notes were funded at a total of $19.6 million. The total amount approved from these 16

[80] http://www.globalpartnership.org/event/madrid-2010

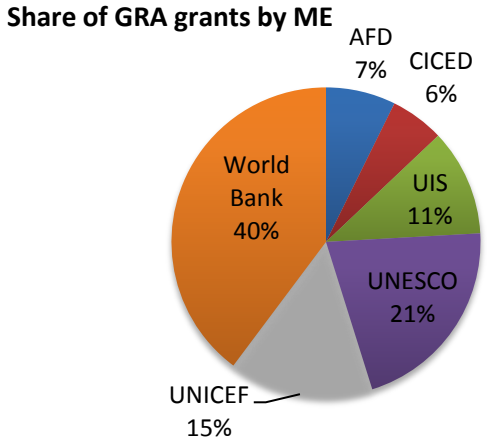
[81] *FTI Framework,* 2004 https://commdev.org/userfiles/file_FrameworkNOV04_0.pdf

[82] The EPDF and Catalytic Fund were streamlined into the GPE Fund in 2011

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proposals was $33.1 million[83], with the largest grant totaling $8.5 million to improve school readiness and early grade reading in Papua New Guinea and Pacific Island countries[84]. Following approval of the concept notes, which were refined multiple times based on feedback from the Secretariat, full technical proposals were developed.

Six different Managing Entities were chosen for the grants: AFD, CICED, UIS, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank.[85] As seen in the graph below, the World Bank manages nearly half of all GRA funding, in the form of the three projects where it is Managing Entity.[86]



At the July 2013 audio Board Meeting, it was decided by the Board that the second batch of GRA funding would be last one, as the GRA program was deemed to no longer "fit for purpose." Three reasons were cited:

- It was unclear whether the decisions rendered possessed reasonable objectivity;
- Whether they reflected additional priorities requested by the Board;
- Whether they represented value for money

Methodology

Findings for this component of the evaluation were informed by two main methods of inquiry:

- **Document review** which included relevant Board documents, decisions and presentations, internal status updates, thematic papers, operational manual, grantee presentations and GRA-supported products. All documents reviewed are listed in the References section.
- **Interviews** with representatives of 11 of 15 GRA recipients, current and former staff, GPE board members, stakeholders in each of the 18 focus countries, and global education leaders. The areas of focus for each category of interviewee differed. GRA recipients were queried about the efficiency of the selection process, the extent to which the GRA built capacity and permitted additional activities, policy impact of emerging products, linkages with other GPE-supported activities etc. In-country actors were asked about awareness of the Global and Regional Activities and their desire for investment in regional and global public goods (GPGs), whereas global stakeholders were queried about GPE's comparative advantage in supporting the production of GPGs.

[83] This amount represents less than 1% of the total of all GPE grants since 2003

[84] As of December 2014, $4.8 million has been reported to have been spent by MEs

[85] In February 2015, the Country Grants and Performance Committee proposed that the grant entitled "Learning Outcomes – Students' Reasoning Skills," which was approved in July 2013 in the amount of $1,850,919, be nullified, due to delays in establishing CICED, a government agency, as the SE in the grant. The Board will respond to this recommendation at its next meeting in May 2015.

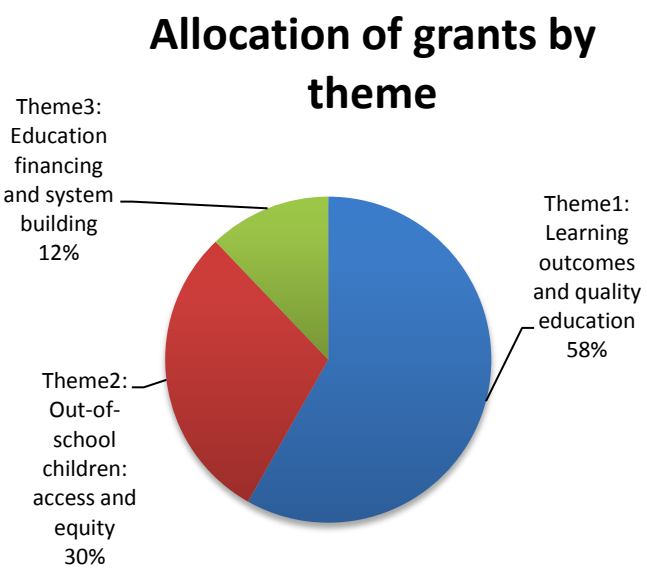
[86] It should be noted that for one of the grants in which the World Banks serves as Managing Entity, the project entitled *Out-of-School Children: Addressing the Out-of-School Children Data and Policy Gaps.*

What follows are a number of *emerging findings* regarding the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the GRA program. Given that all but four projects have closing dates in 2016 or 2017, it is important to note that these are observations based on the initial stages of implementation, and do not represent a comprehensive assessment of the program.

Relevance

Finding 1: The GRA proposals reflect the strategic priorities of GPE and largely align with the priorities of national partners

A review of the proposals funded to-date reveals a high degree of relevance to the three areas of GRA focus: education financing, learning, and out-of-school children, with all projects funded fitting squarely under these areas. Among the three objectives, the greatest investment has been in Theme 1: learning outcomes and quality of education, which is the focus of 8 of the 16 projects and 58% of total funding. Projects focused on out-of-school children receive 30% of funding, with the remainder allocated to projects focused on systems building and financing.



More broadly, the chosen support GPE's five strategic objectives as articulated in the 2012-2015 Strategic Plan, with the greatest investment in Strategic Objectives 3 (learning) and 4 (teaching).

According to in-country interviewees, the chosen priority areas are not simply GPE ones, but also areas of interest at the national level (particularly around learning). National stakeholder consultation was prerequisite for funding – and importantly, where there was a lack of national interest, such countries weren't involved. One such example is seen in the *Improving equity through school grants* project, in which there was pre-proposal dialogue with the Ministry of Education in Nicaragua to serve as a case study, but after careful deliberation, insufficient demand. As such, the proposed list of countries was reduced by one. Conversely, for the project entitled *Significant Reduction of Out-of-School Children* project, several countries expressed interest in being part of this second wave of research (the GRA funding allowed for geographic expansion of an earlier, non-GPE funded project).

Finding 2: Despite a professed desire for more knowledge on emerging best practices and new knowledge, most country stakeholders possesses low levels of awareness and understanding of the GRA program

Across the eighteen focus countries, as well as across different stakeholder categories (e.g. ministry of education, ministry of finance, civil society, donors), there was considerable appetite for practical research, emerging best practices and new knowledge. As mentioned above, national consultation was a requirement for GRA project funding, translating to some level of national buy-in, at least in the initial stages and by some actors.

At the same time, interviews with country stakeholders reveal inadequate level of awareness of the existence of the GRA program. Many of the interviewed Supervising and Managing Entities of Program Implementation Grants (PIGs) in partner countries were not aware of the GRA program, despite overlap between countries supported by GRA research and the evaluation case studies. This

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low level of knowledge suggests the need for further communication efforts between research organizations and country stakeholders, particularly as more products are finalized.

Furthermore, the linkages between those activities supported under the GRA grant and those funded under the Program Implementation Grant were not evident to those queried. As such, there seems to be scope for further sensitization of country partners and LEG members on the synergies that exist between GRA activities and those funding by the PIGs. Both external stakeholders and GPE members cited the need for GRA activities to reinforce and support the activities under the PIGs, rather that serving as standalone research program. Such alignment would reinforce the notion of GPE as a partnership, with a robust internal knowledge-sharing component.

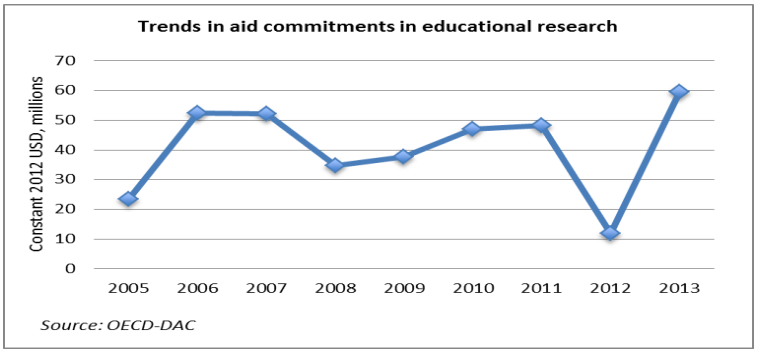
In those few instances where outreach to local education groups (LEGs) has been present, it has paid dividends. For example, the World Bank, which serves as ME for a project to promote school based health interventions to improve learning outcomes and access to education, has made concerted effort to liaise with GPE focal points and LEGs in relevant countries. The results have been positive, resulting in LEG members attending project workshops and significant dialogue regarding the inclusion of school based interventions in the education sector plans.

Other examples are seen in the *District/School Profiles: Information feedback systems and tools for increasing accountability* project, in which equity indicators were developed as stretch indicators for the next GPE grant in Nepal, and in Madagascar where training was provided to school committees for participation in the selection and administration of school construction projects, which are funded by GPE.

However, such involvement with country stakeholders, in particular those part of Local Education Groups, these have proven to be the exception rather than the norm.

Finding 3: International financing for the production of global public goods is limited. This strongly implies the additionality of GRA financing.

Seven of the GRA grantees communicated that sources of funding for regional and global public goods are minimal, with support for such work declining as donors attempt to show quick returns on investment. This notion was reinforced though a scan of other entities that have traditionally conducted the sort of work that GRA partners are currently carrying out: the World Bank Development Grant Facility's is to close down, The World Bank Institute has already stopped covering education, and UNESCO continues to struggle to mobilize adequate financing to meet its priorities[87].



There is empirical backing for this view as well. Aid to global education research activities, an imperfect but useful proxy for support to global public goods shows that such aid constitutes less than 0.5% of total aid commitments to education. Total aid for education research, as reported by OECD-DAC, fluctuated between $11.8million and $59.6 million over the past decade.[88]

[87] It should be noted that one grantee and one global stakeholder disagreed, asserting that donor are increasingly likely to fund this sort of work

[88] [88] OECD-DAC education for years 2005-2013

Even assuming that these numbers underestimate the level of global financial support for GPGs, aid levels remains quite low. In this regard, the money that has been provided by GPE to support the GRA program appears to be additional and not displacing potential other donor funding – a sentiment affirmed by interviewees. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the financing has been catalytic, as 10 of the 16 GRA projects receive co-funding.

Effectiveness

Finding 4: International financing for the production of global public goods is limited. This strongly implies the additionality of GRA financing.

Given the delays associated with the awarding of the grants, it is yet too early to fully understand the impact of the GRA program. Nevertheless, there is emerging evidence that that products deriving from the program or may have important impacts on policy development or the enhancement of current practices.

Examples include:

- In Senegal, preliminary findings from efforts to improve national reporting of financial flow have been employed to redefine the criteria of school grant allocation for 2015. The Ministry of Education also requested a first draft of the study report to be presented at a sector review in March 2015.
- In Madagascar, GRA activities have been a catalyst for streamlining and consolidation of school monitoring tools into one, nationally-owned one.
- An innovative pilot to improve teaching performance in Burkina Faso has engendered discussions with the national education quality group and led to sharing of results within the region.

While encouraging, it is important to note that such examples are anectodal, and do not provide an overall sense of "value for money" of the program nor, importantly, the extent to which results have been shared by stakeholders in other countries.

Finding 5: Underinvestment in oversight and administration of the program has hampered its potential effectiveness. Further work could be done to encourage collaboration among existing grantees in order to optimize the impact of the work.

All grantees consulted communicated that there has been little technical support provided by the Secretariat since implementation, despite extensive Secretariat involvement during the application phase. This has largely been attributable to the quantity of staff available to provide such support.

While most grantees do not view the Secretariat's hands-off approach as in and of itself problematic, two interviewees expressed some desire for further technical guidance in the three topical areas. In this vein, most viewed the movement of the GRA program to the Chief Technical Office as a positive development.

More so than a call for technical expertise, grantees cited lost opportunities for coordination and intra-GRA learning. Two stakeholders identified a desire to better understand the statuses of other GRA projects in order to learn from their challenges and successes. More specifically, it was suggested that the Secretariat play a more hands-on role in facilitating communication and collaboration among those projects occurring in the same regions or countries – or tackling similar topics. While some South-to-South learning has occurred through regional workshops and conferences, this element of the program has not been optimized.

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With regards monitoring and reporting, grantees are required to report on a twice-annual basis, using a standard template. A review of these reports reveal varying quality and depth of reporting. Moreover, grantees report that very little feedback is given on these reports, other than an acknowledgement of receipt. This stands in contrast to the language in the Operations Manual, which asserts that "The Board will use these reports to ensure rigorous management of the Grants[89]"

Efficiency

Finding 6: The inefficient process for selecting GRA recipients involved high transaction costs from all actors involved. This lengthy process eroded confidence of the Board and served as a contributing factor to the decision to not fully fund the GRA program.

Nearly all stakeholders – Secretariat, Board of Directors, grantees -- lamented the inefficiency of the lengthy selection process. Among the various complaints:

- **Transparency on the steps needed to attain the grant** When the process began, some grantees weren't clear about the steps necessary for attaining grants nor amount of available financing, suggesting that additional review. Two grantees indicated that there were asymmetries of information, with certain grantees better informed by the Secretariat than others.
- **Length** From the initial call for proposal to the actual awarding of the grant, the process took over one year. Much of this length was attributable to the back-and-forth between the secretariat and grantees to refine proposals, as well as considerable disagreement between the Board and Secretariat, in an attempt to ensure quality control and a fair process. In some instances, the protracted nature of the process strained relationships with national partners, as timelines for initiating the project were consistently revised.
- **Conflict of interest** Several Board and Secretariat Members, as well as two grantees noted that the Board of Directors were approving grants that were awarded to the same organizations that were represented on the Board, thus calling into question the objectivity of the selection process.

More positively, the Secretariat was praised for the collaborative process of developing the position papers and operational manual and their willingness to respond to questions as they arose.

Future Considerations

It is notable that the review of the EPDF in the 2010 Evaluation asserted that:

> *awareness of the EPDF amongst stakeholders, especially governments, was not widespread. The EPPF has not engendered a broader process of consultation and inclusion…problems relate to processes or modalities, whilst the successes relate to the actual products of the activities funded[90].*

Much of the same can be said of the GRA fund today. Despite the onerous and lengthy, application process, as well as having not fully realized opportunities to connect GRA work with that of the local education group, quality, policy relevant products appear to be emerging.

[89] P.19 GRA Operations Manual

[90] P.19, Annex 3, 2010 Mid-Term Evaluation

More fundamentally, evaluation interviews revealed that there are differing views regarding whether GPE should support the production of global public goods (GPGs). At the risk of not fully capturing the nuances of stakeholders' views, this diversity of opinions can be broadly categorized into two views: GPE should invest in the production of GPGs or GPE should not directly support their production[91]. Of the twenty global stakeholders and Board Members who expressed a view, 60% believed that GPE should play a role in supporting the production of global public goods, believing that it was an underfunded area in which GPE could add value. The 40% who did not support the idea of GPE financing the production of GPGs largely believed that it was the domain of other actors, such as UNESCO and UNICEF.

While consensus on the extent to which GPE should fund a similar program (or an Innovation Fund, as has been discussed) does not exists, Board Members and global education stakeholders who favored continued support in this area communicated that that these activities **should constitute a minority of GPE's total granting volume (which is the case currently)** and that **administration – including more streamlined selection of future grantees, enhanced efforts to link grantees with each other and with in-country work, and more active monitoring – be improved.**

Ultimately GPE's role in this regard will ultimately be linked to its new theory of change and new strategic plan and will be informed by the extent to which GPE sees itself as possessing a comparative advantage in supporting global and regional public goods.

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[91] There was consensus among those interviewed that GPE should play some role in disseminating existing research

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