REPUBLIC OF CONGO EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GRANT PROPOSAL: REPORT FROM THE COUNTRY GRANTS AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

For Decision

1. STRATEGIC PURPOSE

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to recommend the Board not approve the application of the Republic of Congo (Congo) for an Education Sector Program Implementation Grant because the grant proposal does not meet the domestic financing requirement of the funding model and contains no strong justification to warrant leniency. The Committee further proposes that the Board allow Congo to resubmit an application in 2016.

2. REQUESTED DECISION

2.1 Following discussion of the Republic of Congo during its October 27-29, 2015 face-to-face meeting, the CGPC recommends the Board approve the following decision:

BOD/2015/12-XX – Republic of Congo Education Sector Program Implementation Grant Proposal - The Board of Directors:

1. decides not to approve the proposal as it does not meet the funding model requirement to commit to allocate at least 45 percent of the education budget to primary education in cases where universal primary education has not been achieved. The Country Grants and Performance Committee (CGPC) deems the justification provided to obtain an exception to this requirement not sufficiently strong, despite clear messages sent to the country by both the CGPC and the Secretariat during the application process that it had to be reinforced;

2. remains open for the Republic of Congo to submit a revised proposal no later than Round 2 of 2016 that fully meets the requirements of the funding model and that takes into consideration the areas for improvement and observations identified by the CGPC and set out in Table 1 of BOD/2015/12 DOC 14.

Table 1 – CGPC Recommendation, Areas for Improvement and Observations

Recommendation
The Country Grants and Performance Committee has determined to recommend against approval of the grant proposal as it did not meet the domestic funding requirement for accessing the fixed part of the allocation. This requirement requires countries to commit at least 45 percent of the education budget to primary education unless universal primary education has been reached. The Republic of Congo (Congo) has not provided a strong enough justification to warrant flexibility with regard to this requirement. Both the Secretariat and the CGPC have provided the country with several opportunities to provide such a justification. However, the document provided does not convincingly explain why financing allocated to primary education will remain at 34 percent until 2020 though this level of investment in primary education perpetuates inequities in the Congolese education system. In recommending Congo be provided the opportunity to submit a revised application no later than in Round 2 of 2016, the Committee has taken into consideration the fact that Congo was awarded its Maximum Country Allocation in 2012 under the previous funding model and that its allocation was extended in June of 2014. At that time, the Board decided to extend the expiration date of December 31, 2014 for all countries with an existing indicative allocation that had commenced Phase 1 of the Quality Assurance Review but were not approved for an education sector program implementation grant by December 31, 2014 (BOD/2014/06-06).
Areas for Improvement
Note has been taken of the significant weakness of data in Congo - in terms of financial management, education statistics, and institutional risks, among other areas. This has resulted in a strategy with proposed scenarios that are fragile. With regard to the funding gap for the ESP in general as well as for primary education specifically, the Committee has noted that two different scenarios are presented in the Application Form. The Committee would appreciate any revised proposal to include steps to improve the country's data strategy, and would appreciate one agreed scenario for the funding gaps. The Committee acknowledges that the program document represents an acceptable balance of activities that takes into account the priorities of the sector strategy and weak technical capacities identified. However, the Committee also notes the program document presents shortcomings with regard to the results chain, the analysis of lessons learned from previous implementation, and the

lack of alignment of the results framework with the baselines and targets of the Education Sector Plan. The Committee requests any revised proposal to improve on these shortcomings.
Observations
The Committee appreciates the indicators for the variable part, noting they have been well developed. They are sufficiently aligned with the objectives of the sector strategy and mitigate key difficulties the Congolese education system faces with regard to internal efficiency, equity and learning outcomes. Moreover, the indicators appear realistic and achievable within the proposed grant implementation period. The Committee also recognizes that the proposal includes strategies that address inequity related to volunteer teachers and community teachers.

2.2 The following CGPC member disclosed a conflict of interest:

- Douglas Sumerfield, World Bank, as Grant Agent for the proposed program

3. PLEASE CONTACT Sven Baeten at sbaeten@globalpartnership.org for further information.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION

4.1 The application package and Secretariat Final Readiness Review as part of the Quality Assurance Review process are posted on the Committee eTeam site.