REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS SEPTEMBER 29, 2017 VIA WEBEX

INTRODUCTION

The agenda for the Board meeting can be found on the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) website. A list of participants can be found in Annex 1.

This report presents a summary of the issues discussed and the decisions made.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

The Board Chair, Julia Gillard, called the meeting to order at 7:23 am, after the roll call had been completed and quorum was declared.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION (BOD/2017/09/01)

1.1 The Board Chair welcomed meeting participants and thanked them for joining the Board call. In particular, she welcomed Anna Rosendahl for returning to the Board as the Board member for Donor 2.

Meeting Objectives and Outcomes

1.2 The Chair noted that the sole objective for the call was for the Board to make a decision on the recommendation from the Grants and Performance Committee to approve an allocation for an Education Sector Program Implementation Grant for Liberia. The Board document with the decision language has been circulated to the Board early August and the previous week (BOD/2017/09 DOC 02).

2. ALLOCATION FOR LIBERIA EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GRANT (BOD/2017/09 DOC 02)

2.1 The Board Chair invited conflict of interest declarations. A conflict of interest was declared by the representative of the Minister of Education of Liberia, H.E. George Werner, as recipient of the grant. The Board Chair noted that while not present at the meeting, the World Bank also had a conflict as the Grant Agent for the Liberia ESPIG.

2.2 The Board Chair next recalled that the recommendation from the Grants and Performance Committee was sent to the Board for approval early August via the new affirmative vote procedure but did not receive enough votes to pass. Therefore, an audio call was in order. In addition, the Secretariat had received a request from one constituency to discuss the recommendation in an audio call.

2.3 The Board Chair invited Margarita Focas Licht, manager, Country Support Team, to present the recommendation from the Grants and Performance Committee on behalf of the GPC Chair, who was unavailable to join the meeting due to a last-minute emergency.

2.4 The CST manager provided a summary of the grant proposal, which included a request for an allocation in the amount of amount of US$11.9 million for an education sector program implementation grant (ESPIG). She noted that the proposed program is coherent with a central focus on quality, and includes a number of inter-related components to improve quality, specifically ECE, teacher training, principal training, technical assistance to a national assessment system, school quality standards, and school monitoring by District and County Education Offices. The program is clearly aligned with the ESP and consequently a high level of government ownership provide potential for reform at the system level. The program targets disadvantaged counties for ECE and teacher training which will be an important contribution towards the equitable implementation of the 2017-2021 ESP and its credibility as a pro-poor plan.

2.5 With regards to GPC review of the grant application, she summarized the Committee's lengthy and rigorous review process and noted it has been fully applied to the grant. Based on the Committee's detailed discussion of the grant application, the Committee agreed that all the minimum criteria of the Funding Model were met while recommending some report-backs on issues that need close follow-up, including the overage enrollment issue, sustainability, and the ambitious implementation timeline.

2.6 The CST manager responded to some specific concerns on the Liberia proposal that had been received during the affirmative voting procedure, which been considered by the Committee.

2.7 With regard to the requirements of the funding model to access the fixed part of the allocation, the suggestion was made that the ESP could not be considered credible for lack of an operation plan. The CST manager noted that in fact, an operational plan had been submitted and shared with the Committee prior to its discussion of the grant. The Committee had thus deemed the plan credible, also given that it had rcceived the endorsement of the full LEG with all stakeholders.

2.8 It had also been suggested that Liberia might not meet the domestic financing requirement because it spends less than 6% of GDP on education and that domestic financing numbers were not aligned in different documents submitted to the GPC. With regard to the number discrepancies, the CST manager noted that is an issue of whether in a given presentation the recurrent expenditure is referenced, or the share of education in the overall budget, including capital expenditure. With regard to the issue raised of GDP spending, the Funding Model does not include a requirement with regard to GDP allocation to education. Instead, the Funding Model requires countries to either allocate at least 20% of the national budget to education OR demonstrate an upward trend of the share of education in the domestic budget towards 20% and this was the case in Liberia: the share of education in the recurrent budget has increased from 12.3 percent in 2014/15 to 16.3 percent in the 2016/17 budget. According to the projections, this will go to 16.4 percent in the 2017/18 budget and further increase to 17.2 percent in the 2018/19 budget, exceeding earlier projections by guarding education from cuts in a harsh budget environment as a consequence of the negative economic aftermath of the Ebola-crisis.

2.9 With regard to the data requirement, it was pointed out that some country information data is missing in the application form. The Funding Model requires that countries must be able to provide basic financial and education data or have a time-bound plan to develop or strengthen the national Education Monitoring and Information System (EMIS). In fact, Liberia has both. The methodology used for the GPE results framework to assess country progress with regard to data availability verifies whether a set of proxy indicators are reported to, and published by, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). This was not the case in Liberia in past years, but it is now for all proxy indicators for 2014 and 2015, with the exception of figures on education financing but these are included in the application package. Moreover, the ESP includes an annual census

as well as a time-bound plan for strengthening the national EMIS to produce reliable education and financial data and reporting systems and the ESPIG will specifically be used for the implementation of these plans. On that basis, the GPC considered that Liberia fulfills the requirement on data availability.

2.10 A concern was also raised with respect to the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL). It was suggested that the wording on the private PSL in the Board paper does not demonstrate a full understanding of the central place that is given to PSL in the Liberia government's political commitment and plans for the education sector. Regardless of attention in media and public debate, the actual impact of PSL on the education sector was extensively discussed by the LEG during the development of the ESP, which presents PSL as one amongst different pilot projects to enhance learning. PSL is now applicable to approximately 8% of the schools. Even with a more positive evaluation at the end of the 3-year's pilot, the government envisages at maximum a growth to 20% of schools. The CST manager noted that government and its partners have explicitly opted not to finance the PSL, but to focus on other schools through the GPE funding. Therefore, none of the GPE funding is going to PSL.

2.11 Further, the issue of sustainability was raised as a concern. The Secretariat assessment acknowledged the issue of (financial) sustainability of the program interventions in the budget environment and in the context of the upcoming elections. Rather than postponing the application, however, the Secretariat had opted to recommend endorsement to the Committee while categorizing the grant as high-risk on implementation delay in the operational risk framework. These issues were discussed during the GPC meeting, and did not result in any additional recommendations in this regard. The Committee did include a report-back on sustainability to enhance monitoring. The CST manager added that once the grant is approved, the negotiations on the grant agreement would start between the government and the government in place. This process would likely start following the installment of the new government.

2.12 Finally, the CST manager noted the concern from civil society that responses received to its position paper were insufficient. Most of the points were raised by the CSO representative during the GPC meeting. The Committee discussed these points and even included some decision language to accommodate the concerns. However, the concern on insufficient detail on the implementation of the program, including, for example the specific content of trainings that will be provided, had not been raised nor discussed. The CST manager noted that that level of operational detail is not typically reviewed by the GPC and is instead left with the grant agent and government under the monitoring of the local education group. Instead, the quality assurance process of the Secretariat and the GPC looks at program design and whether the proposed program has a coherent results chain and convincingly addresses sector needs identified during the ESP process. Based on that assessment, both the Secretariat and the GPC considered the program design strong. The Secretariat did raise the complex issue of overage enrolment in the education system, and the GPC formulated a report-back requirement to monitor the evolution of overage enrollment in the sector, as well as in the targeted schools. The GPC also included a report-back on the actual selection of targeted counties within the project implementation, upon the request of the CSO representative. However, such follow-up on project implementation is rather unusual.

2.13 The CST manager concluded by reiterating that rigorous due diligence on the proposal had been performed by both the Committee and country-level actors.

Discussion:

2.14 The Chair opened the floor for discussion.

2.15 A number of Board members expressed support for the GPC recommendation. Some board members expressed concerns around timing, especially the risk of the upcoming national election in relation to grant implementation and perceived support to the current administration. Others highlighted the importance of timely approval of grant applications so as not to delay children's education. Comments were also made on the role of Partnership Schools for Liberia in relation to the education sector and GPE funding, the endorsement of the LEG of the grant proposal and sector plan, and governance considerations.

Specifically:

- National elections October 10. Several Board members noted the risks that the new government might not support and implement the grant program and that GPE approval of the grant now could be perceived as support for the current administration and be used to influence the election. For these reasons, the Board members proposed to delay the Board decision on the recommendation until the December Board meeting.

  The Secretariat noted that following approval of the grant, the World Bank as grant agent would proceed with the grant negotiation process with the government. That process would presumably not take place until after the elections. In addition, the GPE Policy on Education Sector Program Implementation Grants requires the approval of the Secretariat or GPC for any significant changes to the grant.

- Partnership Schools for Libera. Some Board members noted the issue of the private Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) and insufficient clarity with respect to the relationship between PSL and the grant program. Those Board members noted this as a risk despite PSL only affecting a small percentage of the overall education landscape. They thus considered monitoring and reporting on the flow of funds would be appropriate to ensure no grant funds would go to PSL.

- LEG Endorsement**.** The Board member representing the Coordinating Agency, USAid, noted it had worked through the LEG on a consultative process for both the ESP and the ESPIG. While normally the Coordinating Agency signs the endorsement on behalf of the LEG, due to the sensitivities, the Coordinating Agency had organized consultations requesting explicit written consent from all stakeholders and had received those. Some Board members, however, noted that the ESP endorsement by civil society had been accompanied by a request for a deeper dialogue on a number of issues that had remained without a response. These issues included for example the development of a comprehensive teacher training framework, increasing the share of the budget for education, and addressing disparities in education.

  The Secretariat noted that a dialogue with the LEG on the grant is maintained throughout the lifetime of the grant and the LEG assists with monitoring the implementation of the grant, particularly on any specific issues. The Secretariat noted that the GPC recommendation included includes a number of report-backs, which normally involves communication with the LEG.

  With regard to teachers, the Secretariat noted that the teachers' association was expressly included in the ESP work on the payroll reform and had been requested to join the steering committee for that program, reinforcing the dialogue with teachers.

- Governance. Board members noted the implications on GPE governance of not approving the recommendation at this time. This included challenging the detailed work of and mandate to the Grants and Performance Committee as well as the consultative and consensus-building work at country level. In addition, a Board member noted that delaying grant approval to address the concerns of political influence and stability would set an undesirable precedent with regard to external factors – from natural and manmade disasters to elections – impacting the timing of grant approvals and GPE delivering on the mission.

  With regarding to the pilot of the affirmative vote decision procedure, the comment was made that the platform used did not allow for discussion or casting a vote for approval while noting reservations. A Board member further requested the Secretariat as an impartial entity refrain from contacting Board members after the affirmative procedure. The Chair of the Governance and Ethics Committee noted that the Committee would examine lessons learned on the pilot of the affirmative vote pilot and present its conclusions to the Board in December.

Decision:

2.16 Following the discussion, the Board Chair noted consensus to approve the recommendation of the GPC as set out in BOD/2017/09 DOC 02. However in view of concerns expressed it was also agreed that the Board will ask the GPC to closely monitor the implementation of the grant including specifically around the assurances that GPE financing will not directly flow to the PSL program. In addition, the Board also agreed that the formal notification of the grant approval would be sent after the election.

2.17 The Board approved the following decision:

BOD/2017/09-01–Approval of Allocation for an Education Sector Program Implementation Grant to Liberia: The Board of Directors with respect to the application submitted in the second round of 2017:

1. Notes compliance with the requirements for accessing the fixed part of the maximum country allocation, as described in the application and summarized and assessed in Annex 2 to BOD/2017/09 DOC 02

2. Notes compliance with the incentives for accessing the variable part of the maximum country allocation and approves the indicators on Equity, Efficiency, and Learning and their means of verification, as described in the application and assessed in Annex 2 to BOD/2017/09 DOC 02.

3. Approves an allocation from GPE trust funds for an Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG), as described in the application submitted and summarized in Table 1 in BOD/2017/09-01 3 (c), subject to:

a. Availability of funds.

b. Board decision BOD/2012/11-04 on commitment of trust funds for ESPIGs in annual installments.

c. GPC recommendations for funding include (all amounts in US$):

Table 1 Application Summary and GPC Allocation Recommendations for an ESPIG in US$:

	Country	**Liberia**
a.	Maximum Country Allocation	11,900,000
b.	Allocation Requested (100%)	11,900,000
c.	Fixed Part	8,330,000
d.	Variable Part	3,570,000
e.	**Allocation Recommended by GPC**	11,900,000
f.	Grant Agent	World Bank
g.	Agency Fee % - Amount	1.75%–208,250
h.	Period	4 years
i.	Expected Start Date	November 25, 2017
j.	Variable Part Disbursement Modality	Ex-Post
k.	Funding Source	GPE Fund

4. Requests the Secretariat to:

   a. Include in its notification to Liberia, the relevant grant agent and coordinating agency, for distribution to the local education group (LEG) of the approval of the allocation and the expected timeframe for signing of the Grant Agreement and grant effectiveness, as applicable, the conditions, requests for report-back, and observations on the program as recommended by the GPC and set out in Annex 1 to BOD/2017/09 DOC 02.

   b. Include an update on the issues listed as "conditions" and "report back" in the annual Portfolio Review.

Annex 1 – GPC Observations, Report-Backs, and Conditions

Liberia	
Observations	The Committee appreciates the coherent program with a central focus on quality, as well as the proposal for the variable part which includes strategies with clear transformative potential in leveraging reform in the assessment of learning achievement and overall management of the teaching workforce, in enabling more equitable distribution of qualified teachers and more informed decision-making with respect to school quality and areas where curriculum reform is needed. The Committee encourages the government to accelerate the growth path of the share of the education budget to primary education to reach 45% within the timeframe of the program. The Committee further notes the importance of close supervision by the grant agent, and encourages the grant agent to establish in-country presence of education specialists. While the Liberia application makes clear that GPE funding will not be channelled to Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL), civil society expressed concerns regarding the potential equity consequences of PSL for the education sector as a whole, noting that the requirement of a strong and credible education plan, in the absence of clarity on the future of PSL and consensus on its role, is compromised. Consequently, civil society sees this as a significant risk. The Committee urges that annual joint sector reviews maintain vigilance on equity broadly within the Liberian education system. Finally, the Committee encourages the local education group to continue building its strong and robust consultation practice by providing timely reporting during ESP and program implementation.

Report-Back	The Committee commends the targeting of disadvantaged counties which will be an important contribution towards the equitable implementation of the ESP. It looks forward to receiving a report-back, within 3 months (by end of October 2017), on the actual selection of the targeted counties, based on clearly defined educational and other criteria related to children's health and well-being. The Committee underlines the importance of involving teachers and their representative organisations, and other stakeholders, in the process. Given the importance of joint sector reviews in advancing the education sector plan (ESP), the Committee commends Liberia for regulating the joint sector review to take place annually and looks forward to reading about progress on the implementation of the ESP and its assessment in the joint sector review in the annual progress report. The Committee notes the complex issues of overage enrolment in the education system and that the program addresses this issue. The Committee looks forward to reading about progress in this area in general in the annual progress report, and specifically in schools targeted by the program as well as on the evolution of the actual school fees in the schools supported by the project, and more generally the progress towards fee-free pre-primary education. In the context of the importance of alignment with and strengthening of national systems, the Committee is eager to learn about the progress on capacity building and measures taken to ensure fiscal sustainability of interventions during ESP implementation in general and specifically of the program.
Condition	Regarding the variable part, the Committee expresses concern about the rollover of payment linked to unmet targets from one year to subsequent years. Such a rollover may undermine the transformative potential of the strategies presented for accessing the variable part, and the stretch effect of indicators and targets. Prior to the signing of the grant agreement with the grant agent, the Committee requests a letter from the government confirming that any rollovers are limited to one year, and no roll-over is permitted for the indicator on the register of teachers on the government payroll.

3. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

3.1 The Chair thanked the Board for their participation on the call. The Secretariat will circulate the approved decision language and a summary of the call as soon as possible.

3.2 The Chair announced that no objections were received by the due date of September 27 on the appointment of Maxwell Rafomoyo, the National Director of the Education Coalition in Zimbabwe, to represent civil society on the Grants and Performance Committee.

The Board approved the following decision:

BOD/2017/09-02–Grants and Performance Committee: The Board of Directors approves the following nominee to serve a term expiring on December 31, 2018 on the Grants and Performance Committee representing the CSOs constituency category:
Mr. Maxwell Rafomoyo, National Coordinator, Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI)

3.3 The Chair further reminded the donor partners that there were still two vacancies on the Governance Committee for donor representatives. Donor 1 noted that a nomination was in the process of being endorsed by the donor constituency category and would be submitted shortly.

3.4 The Board would next meet in Paris on December 5-7, 2017

3.5 There being no other business the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:23am, thanking everyone for their time.

4. ANNEX

Annex 1: Participants List

ANNEX 1 – PARTICIPANTS

Developing Country Partners	
Africa 1	Elyas Abdi Jillaw- Alternate Board member- Kenya
Africa 2	H.E. Ahmat Khazali Acyl, Board Member, Chad Prisca Randrianarison *on behalf* of Minister Rabary Andrianiaina Paul, Alternate Board Member- Madagascar
Africa 3	Gbovadeh Gbilia *on behalf* of Minister George K. Werner, Alternate Board member, Liberia
Asia & the Pacific	Mohammad Asif-uz Zaman- Alternate Board member- Bangladesh
LatAm & the Carribean	Nesmy Manigat, Board Member, Haiti
Donors	
Donor 1	Chantal Nicod, Board Member, Switzerland Valerie Carlier *on behalf of* Anne-Francoise Paradis Alternate Board Member, Belgium
Donor 2	Anna Rosendahl—Board member- Sweden Nicolai Steen Nielsen- Alternate Board member- Denmark
Donor 3	Anna French *on behalf of* Alicia Herbert- Board member- UK
Donor 4	Patrick Empey, Alternate Board Member, Ireland
Donor 5	Marjeta Jager- Board member- EC, Board Member, European Commission
Donor 6	Charles North, Board member, United States
Non-Governmental	
CSO 1	Tony Baker, Board member Kira Boe, Alternate Board member
CSO 2	Kaneez Zhera- Alternate Board member
CSO 3	David Edwards, Alternate Board Member
Private Sector/ Foundations	Randa Grob-Zakhary- Board member

Multilateral Agencies	
UNESCO	Jordan Naidoo- Alternate Board Member
UNICEF- UNHCR	Ita Sheehy on behalf of Carol Batchelor, Alternate Board Member
Multilateral/Regional Banks	Luis Benveniste, Alternate Board Member, World Bank

a. Observers:

Ms. Aida Liha Matejicek--- EC (Donor 5)
Lena Forsgren – Sweden (Donor 2)
Anne-Charlotte Dommartin—Chair of FRC—France (Donor 5)
Sally Gear—Chair of GPC—UK (Donor 3)
Ita Sheehy—MLA 2 (UNHCR)
Marie Bruening—Swiss (Donor 1)
Julia Dicum- Canada (Donor 3)
Douglas Sumerfield- The World Bank (MLA3)

b. List of Regrets

Alicia Herbert- Board member- Donor 3
Anne Francoise Paradis- Alternate Board member- Donor 1
Carol Batchelor, Alternate Board Member- UNHCR
H.E. Dr. Assadullah Hanif Balkhi- Alternate Board member- Afghanistan- EEMECA
Jaime Saavedra Chanduvi- Board member- MLA 3- World Bank
Minister Rabary Andrianiaina Paul, Alternate Board Member- Madagascar

c. Chair and Secretariat Participants

Julia Gillard, Chair
Alice Albright, Chief Executive Officer
Ruth Dantzer, Governance Lead
Margarita Focas Licht, Country Support Team Manager
Padraig Power, Chief Financial Operations Officer
Sven Baeten, Country Lead
Johanna Van Dyke, Board Operations Officer
Michaelle Wane, Senior Board Assistant