Report of the Provisional Independent Technical Advisory Panel[1]
December 21, 2021

GPE 2025 Operating Model
Review of Enabling Factors
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Background

In line with the pilot of the GPE 2025 operating model, government and country partners in DRC have analyzed country progress in four enabling factor areas for the GPE System Transformation Grant. The Country Analysis completed by the DRC local education group and supporting documentation were shared with the provisional Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP), which is tasked by the GPE Board with providing an independent assessment of country status vis-à-vis the operating model enabling factors.

The ITAP assessment seeks to contribute to country policy dialogue in each of the four enabling factor areas. The ITAP also considers the extent to which challenges in these areas act as bottlenecks to country system transformation goals, and based on this assessment, classifies each area as having a low, medium, or high priority for action. A designation of 'high' priority indicates that identified challenges may act as significant bottlenecks to country education system transformation priorities.

This report has been shared with the government and the local education group partners for review and comment. The few minor comments received have been taken into account in the preparation of this final ITAP report to inform Board decision-making on the system transformation grant allocation.

[1] The ITAP operates as an independent advisory body to the GPE Board. ITAP country panel members for this report: Desmond Bermingham (Chair), Susy Ndaruhutse, Sara Poehlman, Richard Sack, and Ann Scowcroft. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the ITAP country panel.

Part A: Main Panel Conclusions

ITAP Main Conclusions:

1. **Data and Evidence – <u>HIGH Priority</u>**

Progress in the collection and use of educational data and evidence has been variable over the last decade and there have been significant challenges linked to governance and accountability. Desired improvements will require harmonized technical and financial resources and enabling environment on behalf of both Government and development partners. Although evidence and data have been used to inform policies to some extent, such as school fee abolition, the lack or insufficiency of data to inform and monitor policies and interventions has been a major weakness and impediment to systems reform. The ITAP concurs that this is an area of **high priority** and that building a functional, reliable EMIS/SIGE and Learning Assessment System are indispensable to enable improvement of systems and outcomes for students and families. In addition, regular conflict-sensitive equity analysis and analysis on home factors are critical to be able to close gaps in school access and learning and to build resilience in the education system and prevent further decline in education outcomes. There is also a need for better data and evidence at decentralized levels particularly given that provinces are responsible for financing and delivery of basic education.

2. **Gender-responsive Sector Planning, Policy, and Monitoring – <u>HIGH Priority</u>**

The 2016-2025 Stratégie Sectorielle de l'Education et de la Formation (SSEF) was developed in a transparent, inclusive and participatory manner and articulates a coherent vision focused on improving equity, quality and governance. However, the organizational context for SSEF implementation is decentralized, deconcentrated and hierarchized with multiple levels of authority and with different management structures that have different financing guidelines. Insufficiencies related to the implementation of the SSEF is clearly a major bottleneck to the education system's effectiveness and its transformation. Given this, plus the fact that delivery is managed mainly in the provinces and is performed by a variety of management regimes (régimes de gestion), the ITAP suggests that understanding the mechanics of implementation is an area of **high priority.**

3. **Sector Coordination – <u>HIGH Priority</u>**

The high-level political commitment to provide free primary education combined with the prospect of very significant increase in financing for education both from domestic and external sources provides an opportunity to achieve transformative change in the education system. However, the ITAP notes that the scale and complexity of the challenges in DRC are very significant and encourages the LEG to give greater attention to specific measures to strengthen coordinated action and the focus on implementation, in particular at the provincial and local level. The ITAP would also encourage the inclusion of key stakeholder groups including religious organisations and grass roots community groups in sector coordination and implementation monitoring meetings at the national and provincial level. Greater transparency and accountability to religious organisations and community groups is likely to

increase the chances of success in the government's plans. The ITAP also felt that there was scope for improved collaboration and coordination with Education Cluster groups especially at the local level to ensure that children affected by conflict and natural disasters are not excluded from improvements to the education system. The ITAP concurs with the country assessment of this requirement area as a **high priority.**

4. **Volume, Equity and Efficiency of Domestic Public Expenditure on Education – HIGH Priority**

The ITAP commends the government of DRC for the greater prioritization it has given to education sector financing as a proportion of overall government spending over the last few years and in the latest Medium-Term Budget Framework for 2022 to 2024. However, the ITAP has concerns that these increases may not be sustainable given that they are being financed by greater debt rather than through additional tax revenue. In addition, there are regular challenges with executing the non-salary education budget and no available evidence that the budget that is disbursed is spent on the priorities outlined in the SSEF 2016-2025. The ITAP therefore concurs with the LEG's assessment of this requirement area as **high priority** as despite the increased prioritization of education spending, households still bear the majority of the costs of financing education in DRC. In addition, there remain significant and sustained challenges with the efficiency and equity of domestic resources for education. The ITAP suggests that addressing these equity and efficiency challenges should be the main priority for the government with a particular focus on targeted equity-focused per capita allocations to provinces. This is especially important in light of the challenges the government faces in increasing domestic resource mobilization without further deepening the fiscal deficit which limits the likelihood of significant future increases in the volume of public funding for education.

Part B: Assessment of Enabling Factors

1. Data and Evidence

Progress in the use of educational data and evidence in the DRC has been variable over the last decade and linked to challenges in larger systems of governance and accountability. The ITAP concurs with the presented analysis of progress and challenges in the production and use of data and other evidence and its impact on the overall management of the education system.

Sector analysis and donor-funded reports have repeatedly highlighted the lack or insufficiency of data to inform and monitor policies and interventions; although to some extent, evidence and data have been used to inform policies and planning. The 2020 GPE Country Level Evaluation maps out how SSEF 2016-2025 was based on evidence from the Education Sector Analysis – RESEN 2014. A base of evidence and plans were developed for out-of-school children (Enfants et Adolescents en Dehors de l'Ecole – EADE) in 2012, which led to the introduction of a school fee abolition policy, and for the Document de la Strategie de Scolarisation des Filles in 2015 to address gender inequities. However, these policy documents were developed under the technical direction of non-governmental actors supported by development partners with little evidence that these pivotal policy exercises reinforced national or provincial education systems or capacity or led to sustainable change.

Additionally, development partners have supported several project or policy evaluations, which highlight similar challenges in data collection and use as those raised in reports on government systems. The findings of these evaluations have not been encouraging, generally concluding that donor interventions cannot be linked to improved outcomes because of systemic challenges and making far-reaching recommendations on systems change. Without disaggregated data on schools, provinces and the régimes de gestion and clear evidence of what works, sector dialogue and planning lack the tools needed for decision-making and prioritizing the multitude of recommendations. Yet development partners have not always aligned support with the systems needed to produce these tools.

The gaps in the EMIS/SIGE have been well documented, and the ITAP concurs with the LEG assessment of the importance of investments underway to strengthen this system in order to inform wider sector reforms and recognizes the challenges and sustained efforts required. The efforts to improve information specifically about children affected by conflict and crisis through the Education Cluster are also critical. Considering historical gaps in school access, some form of regular conflict-sensitive vulnerability or equity analysis, with a meaningful level of disaggregation, is critical to be able to close gaps in school access and learning, and also to build resilience in the education system and prevent further decline in education outcomes.

At the same time, the ITAP notes that the Cellule Indépendante d'Evaluation des Acquis Scolaires (CIEAS) has made progress in carrying out learning assessments in 2020 and commends the efforts to connect different government educational databases to get a more robust picture from analysis of existing data. The multiple databases within the Ministry of

Primary, Secondary and Technical Education (MEPST) may have greater potential for data collection and comparison by using, for example, TENAFEP as a point of contact that could provide opportunities to gather more information on schools, teachers or student background.

Data on parents and home factors are critical to inform education progress and should not be sidelined in strategies to develop data and evidence frameworks needed to inform and monitor sector plans. Since the 2005 education sector analysis, available data indicates that home factors are heavily influential in improving education access and outcomes, yet this evidence is not well reflected in past education interventions, nor in the majority of donor investments. Parents are the primary source of education funding and the determining factor for whether or not a girl or a boy will go to school, with 2021 studies showing domestic issues are still the dominant factors keeping girls out of school. The World Bank 2018 systems diagnosis highlighted that cash transfer programs have demonstrated promising results, which may present important options for reducing household expenditure and improving education outcomes. Without robust investments in school-based factors nor robust strategies or financing channels to address home factors, increased government expenditure has not translated into improved results in education.

Improving the effective use of data for large-scale policy dialogue and system reform requires an enabling political and financial environment, by allowing greater accountability and transparency. Evaluations of the school fee abolition policy provide evidence of resistance to transparency from education stakeholders, including religious institutions and government officials, who may benefit from existing policies or fee structures. Ensuring greater availability and reliability of data requires behavior changes that must be taken into account when planning the way forward.

The ITAP concurs that strengthening the EMIS/SIGE and Learning Assessment System are critical investments to address the main sector priorities on teachers, gender equality and education access. Sustaining the efforts underway will require agreement and harmonization amongst education development partners and education providers on what will be measured, what analysis is needed and for what audience. This may take the form of an education dashboard or minimum comparable indicators to be used at national or provincial level, and across development partners or potentially school management structures, to develop a common overview and measure some impacts at a macro level.

The ITAP recognizes the efforts underway to build regular, reliable education data and learning assessment systems, which will require sustained donor engagement, funding, political commitment and greater alignment. The World Bank supported Emergency-Equity-and-System-Strengthening-in-Education (ESSE) project aims to improve knowledge of sector performance and to build accountability systems in support of improved student learning outcomes and operationalizes the 2016-2025 SSEF objective of improving education quality through school-level initiatives and the use of incentives for improved performance. However, this project was adjusted to remove outcomes such as improved learning, decreased household expenditure on education and decreased dropout in part because the means and systems to measure them were not in place within the project timeline.

The use of data and information at provincial, local, school and parent level could be very impactful and may be catalytic in understanding the application of policies at the school level thereby creating the enabling environment for systemic change. School surveys by independent firms supervised by CIEAS are planned to measure the impact of EQUIP, which also presents opportunities for better analysis and use of data at decentralized and local level. Parents are powerful sources of information; as the primary decision-makers in education funding, they could benefit from some form of school report card, but also provide information on school management as an alternate or complement to school officials. User interface and accessible information products that interpret and synthesize data in a meaningful and actionable way should be considered in plans to link national and provincial efforts and ensure stronger monitoring and sustained contribution of data exercises to building systems and accountability.

Historical institutional challenges and the importance of home factors as education determinants highlight the need to consider a variety of sources of data. A survey of primary schools is planned under ACCELERE as well as household surveys in supported provinces. Learning assessments are currently focused at school level and only recently added some parent involvement in part to enable the abolition of fees that have been required in order to take the national exam. Efforts to promote learning assessments at community level, such as citizen-led assessments, could be complementary and address potential reluctance of school management for public analysis of learning outcomes in their fee-generating institutions. Parents can be sources of school management information, as well as education officials, depending on bottlenecks or monitoring needs in the system. It is critical that these or other complementary sources address violence and conflict which strongly correlate with poor education outcomes, especially for girls. The approach through the ACCELERE project to develop and implement an equitable school grants program also offers an entry point for greater parent input, participatory financial monitoring and accountability to the primary funders of schools.

Conclusion:

Improved production and use of data and evidence are indispensable to strengthen the education system, including sector dialogue, coordination, planning and financing; as such the ITAP concurs that this is an area of **high priority**. The poor production and use of data and evidence for formulating and monitoring plans and policies has translated into an education system that faced poor governance and accountability resulting in few outcomes to demonstrate the impact of investments. As such, the current efforts to build a functional EMIS/SIGE and Learning Assessment System, as well complimentary survey data, are critical steps to systems reform needed to improve girls' and boys' right to education across DRC.

2. Gender-Responsive Sector Planning, Policy and Monitoring

Strategic planning

The most recent, and still current education sector plan, the SSEF, is dated December 2015; it covers the period 2016-2025 and includes an action plan for 2016-2020. In addition, more recent policy-related and planning documentation includes a three-year action plan for 2019-2021; 13/26 regional operational plans for the 2019-2020 school year that identify salient, context-specific issues and objectives, expected results, activities, indicators, costs, and financing; annual joint sector reviews up to 2019, including a COVID specific review; and a 2019 Midterm Review. The political, financial, institutional and conflict-linked risk factors identified in the SSEF are realistic.

The SSEF makes no direct reference to a human rights framework but the focus on ensuring a complete and cost-free primary education for all is consistent with a human-rights perspective, as is the use of national languages in the early primary years.

The ITAP notes the lack of a detailed functional analysis that: (I) would identify the dysfunctionalities that cause bottlenecks; (ii) could identify areas of organizational and management success or challenge; and (iii) identify challenges related to the capacity of the variety of organizational/management entities (national and local governments; the *régimes de gestion*) to effectively deliver on the 457 activities identified for implementation during 2016-2020. The ITAP believes that it will be important to understand how organizational issues along with the co-existence of several management regimes for the government (non-conventionnée) and religiously-affiliated (conventionnée) schools might contribute to bottlenecks during implementation as identified by the 2019 joint sector review.

Gender-responsive planning

The 2016-2025 SSEF and the Girls' Education Action Plan for DRC present comprehensive objectives and indicators for improving female participation in education across different cycles of the education system. Student and teacher data are gender disaggregated in school statistics directories and learning assessments. Data that reflects the specific needs of female learners such as female-only WASH facilities and health education initiatives are routinely collected at national and provincial levels.

Education services are more concentrated in certain provinces and the significant increases in female school participation since the early 2000s are largely at the primary level. The gender gap in out-of-school children is also well known, with more girls out of school than boys in 9 provinces. Disaggregation by urban versus rural settings shows that rural girls are particularly vulnerable to dropping out.

The ITAP underlines the importance of findings in the 2019 joint sector review, which found that the majority of indicators for improvements to female participation in school remained near baseline. It is difficult to determine what part of poor female transition through post-primary cycles is related to social or geographical factors and what part is related to poor learning outcomes early in the school experience. Learning outcomes on national tests for primary are

not strong. There is an implied but unproven causality between poor female performance beyond primary education and issues such as school distance or social conventions related to household responsibilities. While there are benefits to understanding the external factors related to poor retention and performance beyond primary education, there is little examination or understanding of what factors inside classrooms impact learning for girls and young women specifically, especially in early grades where there appears to be little cultural resistance or geographic constraint to including female learners.

Operational planning

The ITAP notes that operational planning does not appear to go beyond 2021; annual operational plans have not been regularly produced since the SSEF implementation launch in 2016. Instruments used prior to 2021 include decentralized provincial and sub-provincial operational plans; 2016-2020 action plans for each of the SSEF's eight programs; and the 2019-2021 action plans.

As noted in the previous section, quantitative data are lacking in a number of important areas (e.g., EMIS, disparities in teacher allocation) and these are not addressed directly in the SSEF or subsequent analyses. Implementation appears to be largely a provincial responsibility, where complete administrative structures mirroring national structures have been created in all 26 provinces, although these are not financed by the central government.

Budget programming and monitoring

The ITAP welcomes the SSEF's reference to a financial simulation model that projects demographic and student flows; pedagogical and didactic inputs; and financial requirements by budget and educational categories, and by year. Financing gaps for recurrent and investment expenditures are also calculated. The model is thorough and well structured; it provides estimates for the various non-salary inputs that comprise the national, if not regional, action plans. The ITAP notes that issues with educational data quality and equity, especially as these relate to the realities of decentralization, could have a deleterious effect on the model's reliability and utility. For instance, there is no evidence from the SSEF or the 2019 joint sector review to suggest that the model has been adjusted annually in order to inform annual budget formulation.

Sector monitoring

The SSEF's overall monitoring mechanism is well-structured and includes three key dimensions: (i) continual monitoring of activities and indicators, which includes data collection by the ministerial planning departments, regular updating of the monitoring framework (SPACE) and follow-up by the Consultation and Strategy Implementation Committee (CCMS) via its thematic groups; (ii) Joint Sector Reviews; and (iii) a Midterm Review meant to assess progress and trigger policy and programmatic adjustments.

The ITAP notes however that thematic groups that were to have guided analysis of provincial plans, associated monitoring and course-correction were not in place. Additionally, the oversight structures comprising ministries, committees and sub-committees was not able to

support optimum monitoring and evaluation. Policy and programmatic adjustments are consequently not apparent in available documentation.

Reinforcement of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and capacity appears situated at national rather than provincial levels. Monitoring and evaluation missions to provinces – which appear to operate fairly autonomously – that were to have been undertaken over a three-year period by SPACE, DEP / DIGE and the AENF directorates from the central level were not carried out.

Areas requiring greater emphasis or attention

The ITAP commends the sector's multi-layered assessments, evaluations and the ambitious planning that has resulted from this. The organizational complexity of the overall system likely contributes to the implementation challenges documented by the sector and sector partners since the last education sector plan. Identifying and addressing weaknesses or gaps in the articulations between human, organizational/managerial, analytical, legal, and financial capabilities and resources is a medium-term action that could support improved systemic functionality. Capacity development for planning and management at the provincial levels may be the most effective way to improve implementation effectiveness.

A closer examination of equity issues across the non-conventionné and conventionné regimes, and organizational and management issues that escape quantitative treatment would add considerable value to the policy and monitoring frameworks.

Annual operational plans, especially at provincial levels, that address the particular needs of local operating environments and conditions, including conflict conditions, would better reflect the realities of decentralization. Lessons learned from the Cluster in the East and North, as well as decentralized modeling in Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa could be instrumental. The financial simulation model would also benefit by reflecting the highly decentralized nature of the system, including the mechanisms and guidance for allocation of resources to and within the decentralized bodies and the administrative structures of the provincial education authorities. Ideally, each province should have its own simulation model. Such a change could more easily situate annual adjustments to provincial planning and budget formulation.

Inverting the monitoring flow from thematic groups based in the provinces up to the SPACE, rather than from the federal level to the provinces, could additionally support more informed, timely and contextually relevant reporting useful for annual planning and budgetary adjustments.

Rural girls are particularly vulnerable to dropping out. The ITAP recommends that geographic and socio-economic heterogeneity be taken into account when attempting to address constraints associated with gender. The SSEF policy response for gender inequalities associated with school-home distance targets school construction in communities more than 5 km from the nearest school. The ITAP notes the doubts expressed that distance from school does not always appear to be the most salient indicator for lack of participation for boys or adolescent girls. This would benefit from close monitoring. Learning assessments indicate that by the end of primary school, only 27 percent of students cleared the language competency

threshold, and only 18 percent passed the math threshold. Many of those students are over-aged and reach mid-adolescence prior to primary completion. The relationship between female school retention and learning achievement deserves closer monitoring.

Conclusion:

The 2016-2025 SSEF was developed in a transparent, inclusive and participatory manner and articulates a coherent vision focused on improving equity, quality and governance. However, the organizational context for SSEF implementation is decentralized, deconcentrated and hierarchized with multiple levels of authority and with different management structures that have different financing guidelines. The insufficiencies related to the implementation of the SSEF is clearly a major bottleneck to the system's effectiveness and its transformation. Given this, plus the fact that implementation takes place mainly in the provinces and is performed by a variety of management regimes (régimes de gestion), the ITAP suggests that clarifying and strengthening implementation mechanisms is an area of **high priority**.

3. Sector Coordination: Inclusive Sector Dialogue and Coordinated Action and Coordinated Financing and Funding

The ITAP noted the comprehensive structures established by ministerial decrees in 2016 and 2017 to promote inclusive sector dialogue and coordinated action to support the implementation of the sector plan. The government has established a *Comité de Pilotage Sectoriel* (CPS) comprising senior representatives from the four ministries involved in education, Ministries of Finance, Planning and Decentralization, chaired by the MEPST and including representatives from leading development partners. A ministerial decree in 2016 established the *Secrétariat Permanent d'Appui et de Coordination du Secteur de l'Éducation* (SPACE) to coordinate implementation and monitoring of the sector plan and to promote coordination across ministries. The *Comité de Concertation Sectoriel* (CCS) is designed to provide a forum for government, development partners, civil society and private sector representatives to meet quarterly to monitor progress in the sector plan and address key issues impacting on implementation. The CCS performs the function of the LEG for the GPE. The sector coordination structures also include Sub-Sectoral Committees and Thematic Consultation Committees at the central level as well as provincial technical committees (CTPs) chaired by the provincial minister of education.

However, the ITAP also noted the findings of the GPE Country Level Evaluation (2020) and the joint sector review (2019) that these structures had not been able to perform their functions adequately due to lack of financial and human resources as well as the political disruption following the elections. This has been compounded by the lack of reliable education and finance data described elsewhere in this report. A particular cause for concern is the weak engagement of the provincial level governments in the implementation of the sector plans and the limited participation of key stakeholder groups such as religious organisations and communities in the monitoring of the implementation of the sector plan.

The country assessment acknowledges the weaknesses in the implementation of effective mechanisms over the past five years and makes strong commitments to strengthen these systems during the next strategic period. This will be an essential requirement if the planned ambitious system changes are going to be achieved. The ITAP felt that it would be helpful to provide more detail on specific actions to improve sector dialogue and monitoring systems particularly at the provincial and local levels. The country might also consider measures to empower local communities in order to mitigate the risks of damage to the education system as a result of conflict or natural disasters.

Given the weaknesses of public financial management and government accountability mechanisms in DRC, development partners have not traditionally been willing to consider providing budget support or aligning with national systems. Most external financing has been provided through projectized support with parallel systems although there has been some technical support to strengthen country systems at the national level and in selected provinces. Much of this assistance was suspended as a result of the political disruption following the last election.

The World Bank has recently approved a large (~US$800M) combined loan and grant for an Emergency Equity and System Strengthening in Education (ESSE) project to be implemented from 2020 to 2024. The principal objectives of this project are to lower the burden of school fees on households and increase access to primary schooling in selected provinces. The project will be delivered using government financial systems with payments linked to the verifiable achievement of key objectives, including the payment of teacher salaries. If successful, this project has the potential to strengthen financial management and project execution at the provincial as well as the national levels. This project could also build the confidence of other development partners to use country systems in order to minimise additional transaction costs and increase the effectiveness of their support. The ITAP felt that this area has the potential to be transformative, particularly if it can be linked to improved monitoring and tracking of household expenditures on education to ensure that the increased government and external financing is achieving the objective of reducing the burden on poor families of the numerous *frais scolaires* that deter them from sending their children to school.

The ITAP also noted the importance of the Education Cluster Coordination mechanisms led by UNICEF and Save the Children International and the refugee coordination mechanisms led by UNHCR in collaboration with government representatives at the national and provincial levels. The continuing high levels of conflict and the impact of natural disasters in the last few years have led to the internal displacement of an estimated 4.5 million people in DRC and a flow of over half a million refugees into the country (2018 and 2019 estimates). A substantial proportion of these refugees will be children. Effective coordination and financing education and child protection must therefore be a key priority. Recent evaluations of the coordination of education planning and responses in emergency situations noted the strengths of the system in some provinces as well as the need for improvements in communication and collaboration between the LEG and the education clusters. Improvements in this area could also help to address some of the gaps in capacity at the provincial and local levels.

Conclusion:

The ITAP concurs with the country assessment of this requirement area as a **high priority.** The high-level political commitment to provide free primary education combined with the prospect of very significant increase in financing for education both from domestic and external sources provides an opportunity to achieve transformative change in the education system in the next strategy period. However, the ITAP notes that the scale and complexity of the challenges in DRC are very significant and it would encourage the LEG to give greater attention at this stage to specific measures to strengthen coordinated action and support implementation in particular at the provincial and local level. The ITAP would also encourage greater involvement of key stakeholder groups in particular religious organisations and community groups who can represent families and households which still bear the largest share of the financial burden for education. Greater transparency and accountability to these stakeholder groups is likely to increase the chances of success in the government's plans to deliver equitable access to education for all. The ITAP also felt that there was scope for improved collaboration and coordination with Education Cluster groups especially at the local

level to ensure that children affected by conflict and natural disasters are not excluded from improvements to the education system.

4. Volume, Equity, and Efficiency of Domestic Public Expenditure on Education

Volume of public education financing

Historically, DRC has committed well below both its peers and the GPE recommended amount to education, averaging 10-16% of the government budget for many years, and only 1-2% of GDP. However, since the Presidential announcement prioritizing the delivery of the Free Primary Education Policy (FPEP) in 2019, there has been a sudden increase in domestic financing for education as can be seen in Table 1. In the Medium-Term Budget Framework, this is projected to be sustained in the next three years.

Table 1: Share of education expenditure in GDP and in total government expenditure

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Education as % of GDP	1.4%	1.7%	2.5%	3.0%	2.7%	3.4%	2.8%
Education as % of government expenditure (excluding debt service)	16.1%	19.6%	27.3%	22.5%	18.3%	21.1%	16.5%
Recurrent education expenditure as % of public recurrent expenditure (excluding debt service)	16.7%	20.7%	31.7%	25.3%	20.5%	27.4%	24.3%

Source: Computed from "Domestic financing requirement matrix" completed by the country

The ITAP commends the government on this significant increase in financial commitment to education. However, the ITAP notes that there have been challenges for many years in ensuring the approved budget is executed in full, due to the government's weak revenue mobilization and budgets being prepared based on projected fiscal deficits. For example, execution rates for public expenditure on education between for the most recent years where data is available suggest overall execution rates of around 80%. The ITAP notes that whilst the salaries of teachers who are on the payroll are generally paid in full, non-salary recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure to support infrastructure improvement is usually poorly executed. This suggests that there are some credibility issues with the education sector budget preparation process as allocations are often vastly different from what is executed and there is little alignment with the priorities and planned outcomes outlined in the SSEF 2016-2025. With the fiscal deficit having further widened due to the impact of Covid-19 on the economy during 2020, the ITAP has concerns about how realistic the forward looking 2022-2024 budget projections are for education.

Historically, the financing of education in the DRC has depended significantly on households paying various fees and top-ups to schools. Whilst the household share has decreased from 90% in 2005 to 73% in 2013 and 68% in 2017, and is likely to have decreased further given the increase in domestic financing to support FPEP, households are still financing the vast majority of education

spending. The overall figure is an average and does vary across provinces where the fee structure is set by the governor of each province at the beginning of each school year.

The main reasons for high household contributions are (i) under 75% of teachers are on the official government payroll meaning fees are charged to households to cover the costs of paying those teachers who are not on the payroll; (ii) teachers' salaries are low and households pay fees to top-up low salaries and incentivize teachers; and (iii) the government budget is not sufficient and disburses very little funding for non-salary expenditure so households are expected to cover this. All of this disproportionately impacts the poorest households which may result in their children either not enrolling in school and/or dropping out once they have enrolled. Cost is the most important factor keeping children out of school.

Equity of public spending

The ITAP remarks that DRC experiences significant gender, geographical and socio-economic disparities in access to education and in learning as well as between types of schools.

Gender disparities: The ITAP welcomes the fact that girls have disproportionately benefitted from the prioritization of the delivery of FPEP since 2019 and that as a result there is near parity in gender enrolment at primary level. However, this national average masks geographical disparities. Repetition rates are slightly higher for girls than for boys and teenage girls have a tendency to drop out of school at a greater frequency than teenage boys meaning that gender disparities widen from secondary level and beyond with education expenditure then benefitting more boys than girls.

Geographical disparities: Disparities are particularly pronounced in rural areas and in those provinces affected by conflict where access and learning are much lower. As an example, data from RESEN (2014) shows that on the primary school leaving certificate, there was a gap of more than 30 percentage points between the highest and lowest performing provinces, and at secondary level, this gap reduced slightly to 20 percentage points. The 2015 Public Expenditure Review (PER) found that rural areas only benefitted from 32% of public education expenditure despite containing 64% of the population aged 5-22.

Socio-economic disparities: The 2015 PER found that public spending on education in the DRC is not pro-poor. The poorest quintile only received 12% of total public spending on education whilst the richest quintile received 33%. At the primary level, public spending is largely equitable but pro-rich spending starts at lower secondary level where it supports a smaller number of students, and is exacerbated at higher education level where the poorest quintile only received 2% of total spending while the richest quintile received 63%.

Type of school disparities: There are two main types of schools that provide education for the vast majority of children – écoles conventionnées, managed by different religious groups, and écoles non-conventionnées, traditional government schools. Both are supported by the government budget. The 2015 PER found that unit costs in écoles non-conventionnées were nearly double what they were in écoles conventionnées. In addition, écoles non-conventionnées received more than double the amount of non-salary expenses than écoles conventionnées, despite the fact that écoles non-conventionnées enrolled over 75% of students. This may be

because the government assumes that écoles conventionnées are receiving supplementary funding from the religious groups that manage them, but this does highlight inequities in resource allocation, assuming that this trend has continued.

The ITAP welcomes that one of the three priorities in the SSEF 2016-2025 is to promote a more equitable education system supporting growth, but recommends that the government commit, execute and monitor (through reporting to the JSR) the disbursement of more equitably targeted finances at provincial level in order to achieve this objective. Notably, DRC's complex system of financial transfers from central level with a certain proportion being linked to revenue raising at decentralized levels, means that there is no equity-focused formula for targeting more disadvantaged provinces with a higher proportion of funds based on criteria such as poverty index, school-aged population, enrolment rates, teacher numbers, out-of-school children numbers, etc. This is exacerbated by the aforementioned challenge of unreliable budget execution, making it difficult for provinces to plan their spending in a strategic way that is aligned to the SSEF. The ITAP recommends that the LEG explores whether developing and using an equity-focused formula and associated financial allocation system could help to ensure that scarce domestic resources are distributed more equitably across provinces. The ITAP also encourages the LEG to consider how to target the enrolment of out-of-school children.

Efficiency of public spending

Multiplicity of institutions: The ITAP notes that there are four Ministries (MEPST, MFPM, MESU and MASAHSN) at central level each with responsibility for different aspects of education. Three of these Ministries (MEPST, MFPM and MASAHSN) have provincial and sub-provincial structures at decentralized levels. Whilst this has been an important aspect of decentralization, having so many different structures with weak coordination (the Comité de Pilotage Sectoriel (CPS) is supposed to meet once a year but has only had one meeting in 2019) is likely to mean that there are some overlapping mandates (e.g. between MASAHSN and MEPST on remedial and catch-up for children who have dropped out of school). The écoles conventionnées (Catholic, Protestant, Islamic and Kimbanguist) and écoles non-conventionnées each have their own parallel governance structures at national and provincial and sub-provincial levels. The 2015 PER noted that there is insufficient coordination at sub-national level between Provincial Ministries and the National Coordination Committees which coordinate the work of the écoles conventionnées resulting in duplication of monitoring and supervision. The ITAP recommends that the government reviews the structure and governance of the centralized v decentralized functions to ensure there is minimal overlap and duplication and to promote efficiency of decision-making.

Internal efficiency: The 2015 PER notes that there are three main reasons for inefficiency: (i) low student-teacher ratios and class sizes; (ii) high repetition (>10% at primary level in 2014 which is the year with the latest available data) and dropout rates; and (iii) unmanaged and unplanned recruitment into the education system. All of these indicators vary across provinces. The 2019-20 annual education statistics indicate that around 50% of children enrolled in grade 1 were aged 7 or older due to late entry into school. This is a pattern that can be seen in all the other primary grades too where due to a combination of late entry and repetition, there is a wide age range in the classroom. This can create higher risk of repetition as well as become more challenging for

teachers to manage classes given the wide age range. As a result of a combination of these factors, the basic education system in DRC suffers from high levels of inefficiency, resulting in wastage of resources. The most recent publicly available efficiency data is from RESEN (2014) with RESEN (2022) just starting and due for completion in mid-2022, so it is difficult to know if efficiency is improving, deteriorating or remaining stable. In addition, nearly 27% of the primary school-aged population, equating to around 3.5 million children, is out of school. The ITAP encourages the LEG to continue to prioritize correct age entry into primary school. The ITAP also suggests that the LEG reviews teacher allocations and rationalizes curriculum options to explore what potential there is for optimizing student-teacher ratios. This along with adopting a policy of automatic promotion for the majority of children in primary schools could help to produce efficiency gains.

The ITAP endorses the LEG's assessment of this requirement area as **high priority.** While the ITAP recognizes that the government has placed a higher priority on education spending as a share of overall government spending and of GDP since 2019, it is not clear if this can be sustained given the challenge in domestic resource mobilization and increasing public debt. Even if it can, the education system faces significant structural challenges resulting in large inefficiencies and inequities in domestic finance for education. The ITAP suggests that addressing these structural challenges should be a top priority for the government given the constraints there are likely to be in further increasing the volume of public funding for education.

Conclusion:

The ITAP commends the government of DRC for the greater prioritization it has given to education sector financing as a proportion of overall government spending over the last few years and in the latest Medium-Term Budget Framework for 2022 to 2024. However, the ITAP has concerns that these increases may not be sustainable given that they are being financed by greater debt rather than through additional tax revenue. In addition, there are regular challenges with executing the non-salary education budget and no available evidence (no JSR has taken place since 2019) that the budget that is disbursed is spent on the priorities outlined in the SSEF 2016-2025. The ITAP therefore concurs with the LEG's assessment of this requirement area as **high priority** as despite the increased prioritization of education spending, households still bear the majority of the costs of financing education in DRC. In addition, there remain significant and sustained challenges with the efficiency and equity of domestic resources for education. The ITAP suggests that addressing these equity and efficiency challenges should be the main priority for the government with a particular focus on targeted equity-focused per capita allocations to provinces. This is especially important in light of the challenges the government faces in increasing domestic resource mobilization without further deepening the fiscal deficit which limits the likelihood of significant future increases in the volume of public funding for education.

Part C: High-Level Summary of Enabling Factors Assessed as High Priority

This table presents enabling factors assessed as a ***high priority*** and the specific challenges which caused the ITAP to classify the enabling factor as a high priority. Countries will be asked to identify approaches to resolving these challenges in the Partnership Compact.

Enabling Factor	Specific challenges flagged by the ITAP as a priority for action
Gender-Responsive Sector Planning, Policy and Monitoring	**Challenge:** The organizational context for SSEF implementation is decentralized, deconcentrated and hierarchized with multiple levels of authority and with different management structures that have different financing guidelines. Delivery is managed mainly in the provinces and is performed by a variety of management regimes Poor implementation of the SSEF is clearly a major bottleneck to the system's effectiveness, let alone its transformation.
Data and Evidence	**Challenge:** The lack or insufficiency of data to inform and monitor policies and interventions has been a major weakness and impediment to systems reform.
Sector Coordination	**Challenge:** Current coordination mechanisms do not appear to be functioning effectively and do not include key stakeholder groups and education cluster leads.
Domestic finance	**Challenge:** Inequitable financing of education across the provinces