Report of the Provisional Independent Technical Advisory Panel[1]

Final Report for GPE Board

November 1, 2021

GPE 2025 Operating Model

Review of Enabling Factors

Tajikistan

Background

In line with the pilot of the GPE 2025 operating model, government and country partners in Tajikistan have analyzed country progress in the four enabling factors as a prerequisite for the GPE system transformation grant (STG). The Country Requirement Analysis completed by the Tajikistan 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 enabling factors.

The ITAP assessment seeks to contribute to country policy dialogue in each of the four enabling factors. The ITAP also considers the extent to which challenges in enabling factors act as bottlenecks to country system transformation goals, and based on this assessment, classifies each factor as having a low, medium, or high priority for action.

This draft report has been shared with government and country partners for review and comment. The comments received have been taken into consideration in the preparation of this final ITAP report to inform Board decision-making on the STG allocation.

[1] The ITAP operates as an independent advisory body to the GPE Board. ITAP country panel members for this report: Desmond Bermingham (Chair), Florence Malinga, Susy Ndaruhutse, Mamy Rakotomalala, and Anise Waljee. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the ITAP country panel.

Main panel conclusions

Data and evidence – high priority

The ITAP concurs with the local education group's assessment of this enabling factor as **high** priority.

The ITAP noted that progress has been made in recent years in broadening the data collected as part of the education management information system (EMIS). As a result, the EMIS now includes pre-primary, vocational education and training and higher education data, in addition to data on general secondary education. However, this data is largely administrative and data on key indicators linked to learning outcomes, internal and external efficiency are not routinely collected or calculated except by externally commissioned studies. The data that is collected is not systematically analyzed and shared with regions, districts and education institutions to inform their resource allocation decisions (finance, staff, etc.).

As noted in the Country Requirement Analysis, the ITAP also observed gaps with regards to key indicators in the EMIS and the data collected from educational institutions on these (e.g., attendance, repetition and dropout; age of children in each class; and financial resources received by pre-primary and general secondary educational institutions) as well as analysis linked to population statistics (e.g., gross and net enrolment, transition and completion rates). Similarly, based on documentation provided, it was unclear what training was provided for staff at different levels of the education system (ministry, regions, districts and education institutions) on the collection, processing and use of EMIS data. This gap appears to also include staff at the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) being trained on secondary data analysis; and presentation of data not just in aggregate form, but also in data dashboards and district and education institution panels in order to help make the data more user-friendly and to create a more evidence-informed institutional culture.

As the Country Requirement Analysis observes, MoES does not yet have an embedded culture of evidence-use in its policymaking and has some significant gaps in the data it collects, and the analysis undertaken on this data.

Gender-responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring – medium priority

The ITAP broadly concurs with the local education group's assessment of this enabling factor as a **medium** priority. The panel however believes the enabling factor merits attention considering the importance of addressing gender in Tajikistan's education sector plan and within the broader partnership.

The ITAP endorses the local education group's assessment that progress has been made towards the development of gender-responsive sector planning and that significant progress has been made in increasing access for girls at the basic education level (47 – 48 percent of

total enrolment). Although, there remain large gender gaps at the tertiary and vocational education level (27 percent of total enrolment).

The ITAP observed the following areas as meriting consideration by the local education group with respect to gaps observed in gender-responsive sector policy, planning and monitoring:

- Capacity-building to improve the gender sensitivity of relevant officials and equipping them with concepts and principles of gender equality and inclusive education.
- Availability of timely and accurate gender-responsive data for planning purposes and ensuring gender mainstreaming.
- Identification of barriers and inequalities that disadvantage all categories of children and girls in particular.
- With respect to inclusion, the panel observed that the plans would benefit from a more cohesive approach to the collection of data underpinned by a thorough understanding and application of the social model of disability as well as a nuanced, deeper analysis of barriers with respect to minority and other marginalized groups.

Some further actions for the education group to consider could include: more detailed implementation frameworks, including clear targets for reducing gender gaps at pre-school and tertiary levels; more analysis of inclusive education with monitoring of key indicators of gender disparity, disability access and exclusion of minority or marginalized groups; strengthening the capacity of MoES to be able to play an effective role in the process of ensuring gender-responsive sector planning processes are in place and utilized.

Sector Coordination – <u>medium priority</u>

The ITAP concurs with the local education group's assessment of this enabling factor.

The ITAP noted that there has been significant progress with regards to sector coordination. It agreed with the local education group that the requirements for improvement in this area, while important and significant, should be categorized as **medium** priority as they are unlikely to be critical risks to continuing progress in priority education system reforms.

The ITAP observed the following needs which might merit consideration by the local education group with regards to sector coordination: the need to continue to encourage increased government engagement in and ownership of sector coordination and monitoring mechanisms, in particular through well-planned and coordinated joint sector reviews; the need to strengthen the involvement of non-state actors in the education group and other sector bodies, including representatives of parents, children and minority or marginalized communities; the need to improve monitoring and coordination of external financing for the education sector, including donor harmonization and alignment; and the need to promote

mutual accountability in the education sector through the use of streamlined monitoring systems comprised of a small number of agreed key indicators.

The ITAP also noted that there might be a gap with regards to the participation of grassroots civil society structures which may be more organic and neighborhood–led and will therefore ensure a local voice in the review of progress as well as insights into challenges and how to overcome them.

Volume, equity and efficiency of domestic public expenditure on education – high priority

The ITAP concurs withs the local education group's assessment of this enabling factor as **high** priority as the availability of domestic financing will have a highly significant impact in the success of the implementation of the planned system reforms.

A principal gap identified by ITAP in the financial analyses and plans was the lack of a rigorous simulation model, or any projection tool that demonstrates the different development scenarios that were prepared before the final scenario of reference was chosen following systematic tradeoff.

The ITAP agrees with the local education group's assessment that there has been positive progress towards the GPE enabling factor on the volume of domestic education spending as evidenced by the sector's share of total government budget increasing from 16.7 percent in 2010, to 17.5 percent in 2015 and 18.1 percent in 2020. The ITAP also notes the increase in domestic public expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP from 5.2 percent in 2015 to 5.6 percent in 2019. However, the ITAP advises caution in the treatment of the targets to increase the proportion to 6 percent in 2021 and in 2022, particularly in light of the COVID pandemic and considering the strain this will place on government expenditure with a heavy demand likely from the health and economic investment sectors. The ITAP noted that most of the sector expenditure comes from subnational budgets. Including this spending in future monitoring of domestic financing for the sector would enable the education group to monitor the equitable allocation of financing across the sector.

The ITAP further noted the very high spending plans for year one of the preliminary costings for the transition to 12-year education, especially on infrastructure. Experience from other low- and middle-income countries shows that there is almost always a time lag at the start of a project. The ITAP would suggest that the expenditure plans are spread more evenly over the medium term. The ITAP would encourage the government to ensure that the final costings for the NSED are carefully calculated and that education plans anticipate that this transition will need to take place over more than one strategic planning period. In addition to the observations from the education group, one consideration for the next phase of the planning for implementation could be low, medium and high-case scenario planning with options for varying spending priorities in the event of a shortfall in the anticipated additional domestic and external financing.

1. DATA AND EVIDENCE

Education Management Information System (EMIS)

The ITAP found that significant progress has been made in collecting education data. Annual school census data is available for the last five years for each level of education on numbers and types of schools/institutions, student enrolment, and number and qualification of teachers. This data is published in the annual statistics handbook. Enrolment data is disaggregated by sex, location (rural/urban and by region) and type of school (boarding, day, special, etc.). Tajikistan's National Statistics Agency has recognized the EMIS as the only source of official education statistics and no longer compiles separate education data. In 2017, Tajikistan reported 9 out of 12 key indicators for education to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

In spite of this progress, the ITAP's overall assessment was that EMIS data is largely administrative and quantitative and is used to produce the annual education data report without being linked to the National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) results framework or to school financing and human resource databases. More specifically:

- **Private education institutions:** Data reported does not distinguish between government and private education institutions. Thus, it is not clear whether it includes data from the latter, which is reported as being collected.
- **Census data:** The most recent census took place in 2010, making it difficult to estimate gross and net enrolment rates, completion rates and transition rates in a reliable manner.
- **Internal efficiency:** Enrolment data does not include data on dropout and repetition. This makes it difficult to analyze the internal efficiency of the education sector.
- **Disability:** This is only recorded in the EMIS for children attending specialist institutions. It is based on the classification of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Protection of the Population (following the medical model of disability) rather than the Washington Group Questions. This means that some children with disabilities are likely to be unidentifiable in the data for mainstream education institutions.
- **Learning outcomes:** There is no individual or school-level data collected on learning outcomes or on teacher professional development.
- **External efficiency:** There is no data routinely collected and used on the external efficiency of the education sector and tracking the transition of school leavers and university graduates into work (employment or self-employment).

When looking at data systems, the ITAP noted that EMIS data is stored in Microsoft Visual FoxPro which is no longer supported by Microsoft. The EMIS is also not online so all updates, manipulation and reporting are manual. The ITAP found that education institutions feed data

upwards for the EMIS but this information is not then widely shared with regional and district-level education departments and schools, making it difficult for them to use it in their planning, management, benchmarking and decision making.

Learning and Assessment System (LAS)

The ITAP appreciated the progress the country has made in the last few years in beginning to measure learning outcomes with early grade reading assessments (EGRAs) carried out in 2018 and 2019 on a nationally representative sample of students from grades 2 and 4. The ITAP noted that a national learning assessment is being carried out on a sample of grade 5 and 11 students during 2021 and that the MoES plans to participate for the first time in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2022 which will look at the recent implementation of the general secondary education competency-based learning approach.

While this progress is welcome, the ITAP found that no individual or school-level data is currently collected on learning outcomes. It is therefore not possible to use the EMIS to monitor the performance of individual education institutions. For parents, the only way to determine the performance of their children in education institutions is through the student's report card, which is limited to school examination grades.

Evidence production and use

The ITAP appreciated that the 2019 education sector analysis gathered and used data on the sector's performance since 2016 to inform the NSED 2021-2030. This included data from EMIS, TajStat, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the World Bank; EGRA data from the 2018 and 2019 assessments; analytical studies on disability, gender and the labor market; and broader demographic, social and economic data on Tajikistan. The ITAP was heartened to see that 69.3 percent of education group respondents (n=13) responded "strong" or "relatively strong" when asked if the sector dialogue is generally evidence-based (local education group self-assessment presentation). The ESA also noted that EMIS enrolment data is used by the MoES to calculate grants and funds for disbursement to schools and to inform teacher deployment decisions, although the EMIS is not linked to financial and human resource databases.

However, the ITAP concurred with the local education group's analysis that there are challenges in the management and use of data with a low culture of using data to inform decision-making and policy. Data that is collected is mainly used by the MoES and by development partners, rather than shared and used throughout the education system and at school, district and regional levels to inform decision-making. This appears to extend to the local education group with only 30.8 percent of group respondents (n=13) responding with "strong" or "relatively strong" when asked if the education group adjusts its strategic priorities, organization and collaborative ways of working as a result of monitoring and organizational learning. This indicates that there is still some way to go even among the donors and the MoES in ensuring their practice is informed by evidence.

The ITAP endorses the priority reform measures outlined in the NSED and medium-term education action plan (MTEAP) in relation to EMIS which can be summarized in two overarching priorities.

- Firstly, the need to invest in an on-line platform to host EMIS data and to have this available online and offline in an up-to-date software package. This would greatly help to build an EMIS that is capable of capturing data on a wider range of indicators (particularly on learning outcomes and on internal efficiency).
- Secondly, the need to invest in training of staff at all levels of the system, in data collection, analysis and use.

The ITAP concluded that two additional areas merit greater attention: (i) Disability data should be collected in a more systematic way using Washington Group Questions; and (ii) data on inclusion (e.g., gender, disability, ethnicity, home language, other factors of disadvantage) should be recorded at sub-national level to enable analysis of intersecting and overlapping disadvantage that can inform mitigation responses.

Conclusion:

The enabling factor should be categorized as high priority

The ITAP concurred with the self-assessment rating by the local education group. Currently, while basic data on access and enrolment is being collected annually, data on quality, learning and internal efficiency is not. This means that it is not possible to get a picture of how students are progressing or performing in schools and how efficient education investment is. In addition, there is not yet a culture of using data and evidence to inform decision-making. This is partly because the information collected is not then shared back with regions, districts and educational institutions, but also partly because some key data that could help inform education policy and strategy changes is not routinely collected.

2. GENDER RESPONSIVE SECTOR PLANNING, POLICY, AND MONITORING

The MoES has developed its education sector plan for the period until 2030, the National Strategy for Education Development, whose long-term goal is the creation of an effective education system that provides inclusive and equal opportunities and contributes to the development of abilities, intellectual development, employment, and improvement of the general well-being of the population of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The NSED which was approved in 2020, is aligned to the high-level National Development Strategy (NDS), and provides an overall strategic framework with regards to implementing national policy priorities in the education sector. The ITAP welcomed the indication that the plan was developed through a participatory process with a range of stakeholders in the sector taking part with the MoES taking the lead, and the local education group Chair and Co-Chairs providing support throughout the process.

The NSED is the main policy document in education. It sets medium and long-term goals and objectives for the development of education and determines the guidelines and priority directions for the development of the education system in the Republic of Tajikistan.

The key objectives of the NSED for the period until 2030 are as follows: (i) ensuring equal access and participation in education and science at all levels for all throughout life; (ii) improving the quality and relevance of education and science at all levels; (iii) strengthening effective governance of the education sector; and (iv) providing safe and socially inclusive schools and other educational institutions in accordance with national policy on disaster risk management and adaptation to climate change.

According to the evidence provided to the ITAP, there appears to be progress to ensure inclusiveness in the education sector in Tajikistan although inequality is still prevalent. Enrollment at primary school (grades 1–4) is very high for both sexes, and girls constitute 48 percent of all students. At the general secondary level (grades 10–11), 45 percent of students are girls and at tertiary level only 29 percent are girls.

The NSED identifies the following barriers that hinder girls' access to education: insufficient growth in the number of preschool institutions; poor quality of school infrastructure in the regions; and relatively low qualifications of teachers. Barriers to improving education outcomes for girls are low attendance rates; inadequate access to improved sanitation and water supply in rural schools; physical, financial and cultural barriers to overcoming social exclusion; and gender inequality in terms of access to education at all levels.

Children with disabilities continue to face challenges in accessing education in Tajikistan although the government signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018. Through the National Policy of Inclusivity of Children with Disability, numbers of children with disabilities in public schools and those in homeschooling programs increased

considerably despite the current education coverage of children with disabilities being much lower than the population of children born with disabilities registered in the government database, according to analysis done by partners.

Studies indicate that girls with disabilities in particular have very limited opportunities for education as families prefer to keep them at home for their safety, in contrast to boys with disabilities. Removing social, economic and cultural barriers to inclusive education remains a challenge as children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities are still marginalized.

The ITAP found that the NSED is a comprehensive national policy framework with Inclusive education strategies provided at every level of education. The inclusion of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims at "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all," with all its objectives, is evidence of the commitment of the government towards providing inclusive education.

The NSED highlights priority reforms together with the activities that will have to be implemented to achieve the reforms. The NSED includes a strategic framework for reforms in the education sector, spelling out the required resources, medium-term outcomes, long-term outcomes and impact, and emphasizing inclusiveness. The government has prioritized gender parity within educational reform projects to ensure national strategies encourage girls to complete basic education, and scholarships for higher education are provided.

The NSED is linked to the goal of SDG4, broken down with a brief description of the sub-goals that address the issue of inclusive education, as follow: (i) SDG 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. (ii) SDG 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

The objective of ensuring equal access and participation in education has a number of reform priorities outlined. The most relevant to inclusive education is "ensuring the involvement of local communities and sub-national governments in the organization of inclusive education, as well as expansion of the content of preschool education in order to meet the educational interests and needs of all categories of children regardless of gender, special needs, social status and ethnicity." The ITAP felt that this was particularly important in the context of Tajikistan which has substantial numbers of ethnic minority communities. These include Uzbek (13.8 percent) and Kyrgyz communities, who live mainly in the high near-desert plateau in the far north of the country, as well as Russian, Turkment, Arab and Tartar communities. Considering the particular needs of these communities would strengthen NSED implementation, as would ensuring that the concepts and principles of gender equality and inclusive education are embedded in all training programs.

While NSED strategies recognize gender stereotypes and poor school conditions as obstacles to girls' education, several interrelated factors contribute to girls' dropping out of school and

their constant absenteeism, some of which are beyond the education sector. Transition to a more regular analysis of inclusive education would help ensure that all disadvantaged groups of children are covered to inform the policy development and planning processes and eventually implementation. This will require gender-disaggregated data identifying all the disadvantaged groups as far as access to education is concerned, including a detailed analysis of the barriers that hinder their participation.

One example is the issue of minority groups who have migrated to Tajikistan and speak different languages. While in some reports it is stated that language is not seen as a barrier to access preschool education, there are many national minority groups who speak different languages and lack learning and teaching materials.

Most analysis reports point out that some of the barriers for girls and children with disabilities are deep-rooted into culture and beliefs of the community which require concerted government effort to handle. The ITAP reviewed several studies and analyses on inclusive education that had been undertaken to inform the education sector planning and review processes. Undertaking such studies on a regular basis, with ministry and local education group involvement, are a good way to gather information and monitor progress.

Successful implementation of inclusive education requires the participation of various stakeholders/actors such as parents, other sectors, development partners, civil society, NGOs and others. It appears the local education group takes the lead in ensuring coordination of all actors in the education sector. Whereas many of these stakeholders participate in education sector reviews, they could also be involved in the policy reform and implementation plans since it is clear that the government cannot fund the entire NSED and some of the reforms may best be implemented by these other actors.

Monitoring and evaluation is undertaken through the joint sector review which is conducted annually, spearheaded by the local education group and the MoES. Broader stakeholder group involvement in the review could strengthen the country response to inclusion challenges, as some of the barriers to education for girls and children with disabilities require a multi-sectoral approach to interventions.

The ITAP noted and endorsed the recommendation in the GPE's summative evaluation of its support to Tajikistan (March 2020) and the self-assessment of the local education group that there was scope to increase the national ownership of the sector plans and for MoES to play a more significant role in the planning and execution of the joint sector review.

Conclusion:

The enabling factor should be categorized as medium priority.

There is evidence of existence of an inclusive sector plan that was developed with participation of the various stakeholders in the education sector. The following issues may benefit from further attention: more detailed implementation frameworks; more analysis of inclusive

education with monitoring of key indicators of gender disparity, disability access and exclusion of minority or marginalized groups; strengthening the capacity of MoES to be able to play an effective role in the process of ensuring gender-responsive sector planning processes are in place and utilized.

3. SECTOR COORDINATION

Inclusive sector dialogue and coordinated action

The ITAP assessment is that there is evidence of significant and important progress with regards to the development of an inclusive sector dialogue and coordinated action over the past decade in the education sector in Tajikistan.

In particular, the production of the long-term strategy (NSED), the medium-term education action plans and annual joint sector reviews are evidence of coherent policy formulation and sector planning supported by coordinated dialogue with development partners and (to a lesser extent) other stakeholders in the education system. The ITAP saw evidence of a significant improvement in the quality of these plans and reviews over time and concurs with the findings of the 2020 summative evaluation of GPE's support to Tajikistan that there has been an increased use of evidence to inform planning. Although, as noted elsewhere in the ITAP report, this continues to be limited by the lack of reliable data in some key areas.

Sector coordination appears to be well established with a local education group jointly led by the government (MoES) and development partners (UNICEF and EU). The group's terms of reference have recently been developed and will help to clarify roles and responsibilities and, in particular, ensure that government ownership and leadership of the group continues to grow. The ITAP notes the finding of the summative evaluation that the education group is "not yet a body that truly represents the education sector" and that the involvement of civil society organizations and the private sector in the group is weak. The ITAP also notes that the Country Requirement Analysis indicates that steps were taken in 2020 to expand the group's membership. The ITAP recognizes that there are political and cultural constraints that may limit the space for voices of non-state actors but would encourage the local education group to continue to expand the active participation of a broader range of stakeholders, ideally including the voices of the key beneficiaries of the education sector, including children and parents. The creation of a capacity-building facility for government officials could further strengthen their leadership of the joint sector review process. The ITAP concurs with the education group's recommendation to rotate the coordinating agency on an annual basis, or every two years, depending on what the stakeholders decide.

Monitoring and mutual accountability is noted as a weak point in the sector coordination process in Tajikistan (as in many other countries). The lack of reliable data in key areas including learning and finance makes it very difficult to assess with confidence the impact of previous investments by GPE and other development partners over the past decade. This challenge is magnified by the adoption of a large number of indicators (100+) in the education sector plan which will make effective monitoring of progress extremely difficult. While the ITAP recognizes the importance of establishing a comprehensive monitoring framework, it would advise that the education group consider selecting a smaller number of key indicators that it will monitor on a regular basis in order to track progress during the implementation phase of

the medium-term action plan. On the whole, the ITAP agrees with the education group's assessment of progress and the priority areas that should be addressed.

Coordinated financing and funding

Progress on coordinated financing, resource mobilization, harmonization and alignment appears less positive. As noted in the finance section of this report, government investment in the education sector has increased significantly over the past ten years but it is not possible to determine whether external financing has increased in line with domestic financing over the same period. The Country Requirement Analysis indicates that the local education group has recently updated its donor activity matrix to include mapping of donor aid for the education sector, although this matrix was not made available to the ITAP. Continuing to use this tool to monitor progress on external financing in line with NSED objectives would re-enforce coordination efforts.

Several members of the education group indicated in their responses to the self-assessment survey that monitoring of finance and implementation of plans was an area of weakness. No development partners are using budget support and there was no intention to increase the use of government systems to improve alignment over the next strategic period (although the World Bank IDA is implementing its support through the ministry). This lack of progress on harmonization and alignment appears to be due to a lack of confidence in the transparency and reliability of national systems. The use of parallel systems is likely to have a negative impact on implementation and will almost certainly be a contributory factor in the perception identified in the 2020 summative evaluation of GPE's support to Tajikistan that the ESP process was "something separate" from the normal activities of the ministry. The ITAP recognizes the challenges of working with government systems in a situation where there may be concerns about governance and transparency. However, to make progress toward coordinated funding steps should be taken over the next strategy period to address the weaknesses in the systems and improve them.

Conclusion:

The ITAP agrees with the local education group that there has been significant progress with regards to sector coordination and that the areas for strengthening, while important and significant, should be categorized as **medium priority** as they are unlikely to be critical risks to continuing progress and success in the proposed education system reforms.

4. VOLUME, EQUITY, AND EFFICIENCY OF DOMESTIC PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

Volume of public education financing

The ITAP noted that its assessment is conducted at the end of the education sector planning process and in the early phase of preparation of a grant application for GPE funding. The ITAP noted that there had been considerable progress in the planning and programming phases, including the assessment of financial feasibility and sustainability, and the establishment of control measures in the plan such as regular joint sector reviews. The ITAP appraisal of domestic financing identified a number of challenges that need to be monitored carefully and, in some cases, may need to be adjusted immediately to minimize risk of failure during NSED implementation.

The principal gap identified by ITAP in the financial analyses and plans was the lack of a rigorous simulation model, or any projection tool that demonstrates the different development scenarios that were prepared before the final scenario of reference was chosen following systematic tradeoff. One option for resolving this gap would be to further develop this model along with more detailed and costed action plans, including details of the basic cost inputs.

The ITAP felt that an additional challenge was that the resource mobilization plan appears to be ambitious and would advise MoES with the local education group to develop further detailed plans on how these financing levels will be reached in the short-medium term. Table 1 below shows a six-year trend of expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP as well as projections for the next three years. The ITAP noted that over the last six years, expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP never reached 6 percent, with a peak of 5.8 percent in 2017, declining to 5.4 percent in 2020. Given the global health crisis, which has had effects on the economic conditions in most countries, jumping from 5.4 percent to 6.0 percent in one year seems ambitious and plans predicated on this assumption may be volatile to resource risks. The ITAP suggests Tajikistan reviews its financial policy commitment (such as the medium-term expenditure framework), with clear demonstration on how these significant increases in spending on education might be affected. As a caution, the policy on resources to education is dependent on a country's political commitment, as opposed to technical assumptions.

Table 1: Share of education expenditure in GDP

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Education as percent of GDP	5.2 percent	5.6 percent	5.8 percent	5.4 percent	5.6 percent	5.4 percent	6.0 percent	6.0 percent	5.9 percent

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

The ITAP also noted that in the preliminary costing for the transition to 12-year education, the first year of the implementation plan appears to be heavily loaded with high-planned expenditure, relative to other years. The total cost in year 1 is about four times the cost associated with year 2 activities. Evidence

from implementation in other countries has shown there to be systematic drag in kicking off and so lumping all that cost in the first year may be a recipe for low performance. Moreover, more than 75 percent of the total cost relates to the setup costs, which is projected to be incurred during the first year (and 86.2 percent of the setup costs is for new classrooms). This means Tajikistan will need to construct 8,976 classrooms within the first year to accommodate an estimated 204,657 additional pupils in the 2020-2021 academic year. Available documents do not demonstrate the technical capacity of Tajikistan to construct such a number of classrooms, and without such demonstration, it is fair to conclude that this ambition would impose a potentially unprecedented implementation challenge in the country. There is a need for Tajikistan to review the target of classrooms annually, which will inherently spread associated costs across the implementation timeframe. The ITAP would encourage the government to ensure that the costs of the transition to 12-year education are carefully calculated and the education plans should anticipate that this transition will need to take place over more than one strategic planning period.

Equity and efficiency of public education financing

Fragmentation: The ITAP notes that there is a variety of different approaches to funding different levels of education, overseen by a range of actors and resulting in fragmentation of public resources. Per Capita Financing (PCF) is a well-established mechanism for allocating resources to mainstream general secondary education schools and has recently (2019) been introduced in some, but not all, pre-schools. The PCF budget allocation is set centrally but then financed sub-nationally and not always in full. Vocational education and training (VET) institutions are in part funded and overseen by two separate ministries (the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment of the Population for initial or primary VET and the MoES for secondary and higher level VET), with some duplication in structure and functions. Higher education institutions and specialist boarding schools for orphans and children with disabilities are all funded centrally. This fragmentation indicates that there may be scope for improvements in efficiency.

Efficiency: As the ITAP remarked in the earlier section on data and evidence, the MoES does not routinely collect data on learning outcomes, repetition and dropout rates. Without this data, it is not possible to undertake in-depth efficiency analysis to see whether there are year-on-year improvements in efficiency of public education spending at each level (pre-school, general secondary, vocational and higher education) and in value for money. Despite this, the ITAP notes that relative both to other low-income countries and to other countries in Central Asia, Tajikistan has achieved an average of 10.7 years of school at a relatively low level of GDP per capita. Also, survival rates to grade 10 of general education have improved from 69.1 percent in 2011 to 77.5 percent in 2019, indicating a higher level of retention and improvement in internal efficiency of the system.

Equity across levels: While there has been a substantial increase in funding for all levels of education, the share of funding for general secondary, primary and secondary VET is decreasing despite an increase in the number of students. At the same time, the share of funding for pre-school and higher education is increasing. The ITAP recommends that the local education group undertake further analysis on unit costs at each level to understand whether these trends are resulting in effective public spending

across the different sub-sectors or levels of education, particularly given the recent introduction of PCF at pre-school level.

Equity across regions: The PCF mechanism has resulted in the general secondary education budget becoming more equitable across regions. Its allocation formula considers school enrolment, school type, number of languages of instruction and district-level coefficients, though it does not include any weighting for vulnerable or disadvantaged children. There have been some challenges in translating the PCF budget into expenditure as the budget is approved at central government level but then a large proportion is financed by sub-national governments that are not always able to guarantee full allocation of funds, especially for non-salary expenditure. The ITAP notes the absence in most of the policy, planning and sector review documents of the significant involvement of sub-national local government actors. Given the substantial (70 percent+) financial contribution which local governments are required to make to the delivery of education in their regions, the ITAP believes this absence is an important gap which should be addressed in the next phase of planning and review at the country level. Attention needs to be paid to the geographical variations in the country with some regions sparsely populated and difficult near-desert and mountain environments in addition to the usual urban-rural divide with respect to taxable income. It is likely that inequalities of financing available through local taxation as well as variations in capacity, particularly in the poorer regions, are significant factors affecting the successful implementation of education sector plans and will impact on the success of achieving the system reforms proposed in the planned application for GPE support. The ITAP concurs with the recommendation in the draft 2021 public expenditure review that a simulation exercise looking at different scenarios could be beneficial to help review the PCF formulae and weightings used by the Ministry of Finance at national level and ensure a more targeted focus on equity.

The ITAP also recommends that the local education group undertake more detailed efficiency and effectiveness analysis of public spending at all levels with a focus on ensuring greater equity across levels, across regions and districts, and for the most disadvantaged.

Conclusion:

The ITAP endorses the local education group's assessment of this enabling factor as **high priority** as the availability of domestic financing will have a highly significant impact on the success of the implementation of the planned system reforms.