GPE Secretariat Management Response for:

Summative Evaluation of GPE's COVID-19 Response

Final Draft - May 2024

The GPE Secretariat welcomes the *Summative Evaluation of GPE's COVID-19 Response* conducted by the Triple Line Consortium and thanks the Consortium for the useful analysis and lessons this study provides. The evaluation offers timely and important information on assessing the continued relevance, coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness of GPE's response to the pandemic, as well as its potential for impact in partner countries. The evaluation offers recommendations used by the Secretariat to communicate regarding the level of success of GPE's COVID-related efforts and improve GPE's operations in support to education system resiliency and adaptation to crisis. The evaluation's findings and recommendations were discussed during the October 2023 PILC meeting and were presented to the Board during a webinar in November 2023.

The GPE Secretariat Management Team considers the evaluation findings to be fair and, overall, agrees with the recommendations formulated for the Secretariat. Specifically, the Secretariat is implementing the improvements outlined below in response to the recommendations.

Please refer to **Annex 1** for further details on the timetable and responsibilities for the different actions.

1. **Recommendation #1 to the Secretariat:** *GPE's COVID-19 support was the partnership's first foray into large-scale humanitarian response. An overarching recommendation is therefore to explore the extent to which this should become an institutionalized, core component of GPE's work in the context of potential future emergencies.*

Management response:

The Secretariat partially agrees with this recommendation: The COVID-19 support was adopted by GPE's Board of Directors in response to exceptional circumstances, based on the established practice of support to continuity in education services during situations of crisis in GPE partner countries. As such, GPE already had some mechanisms in place which were sufficiently adaptable to support multiple countries, under the direction of the GPE Board (e.g., GPE adapted the ESPDG and accelerated funding mechanisms to better respond to varied country contexts). There was no expectation that large-scale humanitarian response would become an institutionalized component of GPE's support. However, it is indeed relevant to reflect on how GPE will effectively support partner countries to strengthen education systems and ensure education continuity during future crises in a world where disruptions to education are on the increase and the possibility of future large-scale school closures is real.

The GPE Secretariat will:

- Consider the question of GPE's added value in providing large-scale support to resilient education systems in the development of the 2030 Strategy.

2. **Recommendation #2 to the Secretariat:** *GPE should explore how its regular operations can support system resilience in GPE partner countries to prepare for future emergencies.*

Management response:

The Secretariat agrees with this recommendation. GPE's goal is to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century. To effectively deliver on this goal, GPE operations need to support system resilience and adapt support as contexts change. GPE already has mechanisms to do so and has adopted a 'learn and adapt' approach to its operations that involves continually assessing these mechanisms to ensure they are fit for purpose across the range of contexts GPE supports. Concretely, the 'enabling factor' on gender responsive planning includes an assessment of whether partner countries have in place preparedness plans which allow continuity of education in cases of crises, including those brought on by climate change. Moreover, support for analysis, planning, and coordination to better prepare for future emergencies is included as an eligible focus of the GPE System Capacity Grant. In addition, GPE's System Transformation Grant can support actions to strengthen system resilience when this is an element of a theory of change to deliver system transformation. Finally, GPE's Technical Assistance Initiative on climate smart education is supporting several dimensions of education systems that need strengthening to adapt to climate change, and GPE's school meals Technical Assistance Initiative is working across sectors to strengthen national school meal programs that are critical to learning and ensuring children have essential nutrition during crises.

The GPE Secretariat will:

- Explore the need to further strengthen operational support for resilience, in particular in relation to climate change, in GPE2030

3. **Recommendations #3 a) b) c) to the Secretariat:** Three areas related to grant operations and quality assurance:

   3 (a) *GPE could consider developing a "ready to roll" contingency plan and standard operating procedure, should it be needed for future emergencies. This approach should consider a) the need to balance the high speed achieved through the AF grant approval processes with the need for sufficient quality assurance; b) providing additional technical support to countries facing the harshest circumstances.*

   3 (b) *Future emergency responses could adopt a similar [grant] screening process, while creating clearer requirements for targeting vulnerable groups, including girls.*

   3 (c) *In future emergencies, mechanisms need to be in place to encourage grant agents to use the flexibility of grant mechanisms to ensure continued relevance of activities to changing contexts and based on emerging evidence.*

Management response:

The Secretariat agrees with these three recommendations. In fact, the COVID19 AF guidelines provided substantial leniency for government and grant agents to adapt programs to ensure continuous relevance of activities, which was also tested by the Secretariat when assessing extension requests.

Since then, the GPE Secretariat has:

- Updated its standard operating procedure to ensure government and partners assess the need for adaptations of GPE grants in case of emergencies.
- Updated its quality assurance framework for accelerated funding, as well as adaptations of programs in situations of crisis, including specific standards to ensure targeting of vulnerable groups including girls and gender equality more broadly.

- Adopted a similar review process as used for the COVID grants for other emergency funding. This includes assessment of complementarity with interventions of other organizations such as ECW, which was also done for the COVID grants.

In addition, GPE country teams continually seek to adapt their time commitments to contexts and tend to provide more technical support in contexts where the needs are greatest, whether due to crisis, limited capacity in local education group, or more complex political circumstances.

The GPE Secretariat will:

- Continue to streamline and improve quality assurance and approval processes through the Deputy CEO led 'Pilates' project, which was launched in 2023. The project is developing clearer and more streamlined roles and responsibilities for country-facing work, with clearer lines of accountability and more efficient decision processes.

4. ***Recommendation #4 for the GPE Secretariat:*** *The GPE Secretariat should formulate an approach based on growing evidence [on remote learning] on how technology could be deployed for continued learning given varying technology capacity in countries and their aspirations for leveraging technology.*

Management response:

The Secretariat agrees with this recommendation. In fact, as part of its Technical Assistance Initiative, the Secretariat has worked with key partners to develop a Technology for Education (Tech4Ed) Technical Advisory Initiative. In broad terms, the initiative focuses on strengthening the capacity of ministries of education to assess needs and develop context-responsive education technology strategies. The framework for initial pilots in Ghana and Tajikistan is currently at the approval stage, and an allocation of US$1 million is available for its implementation. The Board will determine in June 2024 whether to add an additional US$2 million to enable piloting in additional countries. GPE has also launched a global reference group under this Technical Assistance Initiative that will facilitate learning and sharing of information on what works in technology for education, which may include distance learning.

5. **Recommendations #5 a) b) c) for the GPE Secretariat**: Three areas related to grant monitoring:
   5 (a) *Future grant mechanisms (whether under emergency circumstances or not) should encourage grant agents to track whether interventions are reaching beneficiaries.*

   5 (b) *Greater Secretariat oversight of progress and completion reports (in addition to the use of evidence throughout implementation), to ensure that the reports comply with M&E guidelines and the data presented is complete, can help improve the quality of reporting.*

   5 (c) *Improved guiding questions, checklists and definitions could be featured in grant reporting guidelines to ensure a more grounded assessment.*

Management response:

The Secretariat agrees with these three recommendations. The Secretariat has adopted simpler templates directed at identifying issues and is focusing staff capacity on more in-depth follow-up of program implementation with grant agents and other stakeholders to determine whether *and how* beneficiaries are actually reached. Roles have been redesigned as part of 'Project Pilates' led by the DCEO, to create greater capacity and responsibility for grant monitoring and portfolio management.

The GPE Secretariat has:

- Developed standard simplified templates on the different grants which, in addition to requiring reporting on beneficiaries reached and other standard indicators, focuses on identifying implementation issues
- Created an online reporting tool to enhance compliance with reporting requirements and simplify data collection and verification
- Continued to follow up on report submission and quality assurance (ongoing).
- Modified country facing roles, creating a CPO role with greater responsibility and empowerment for portfolio monitoring during grant implementation.

6. **Recommendation #6 for the GPE Secretariat:** *For global/cross-national grants producing knowledge goods, concerns with reporting data might be easily met if visualization and download data were required for completion reports and regular monitoring.*

Management response: The Secretariat partly agrees with this recommendation. Reporting against jointly agreed indicators was required every eight weeks for the first 10 months of the program, after which reporting became quarterly as activities developed implementation rhythm and results were more able to be demonstrated. Global grant activities were not solely funded by GPE but co-financed by the implementing organizations (World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF), creating some attribution challenges. Additionally, the wide range of activities supported by the grant – 22 in total – through decentralized processes and shifting realities on the ground made regular data collection challenging, especially in earlier phases. Concerns over reporting data – i.e., those centered on attribution and availability – would not have been easily met with visualization and download data, yet this would have helped assess uptake of knowledge goods.

This is a good recommendation for ongoing and future knowledge-producing mechanisms of GPE. As an example, there are ongoing efforts on improved communication of results/data in KIX and EOL in close collaboration with the grant agents, IDRC and Oxfam Denmark, respectively.

The GPE Secretariat will:

- Require that access and download of publicly available knowledge products be included in completion reports for similar types of initiatives.

Annex 1 - Key recommendations and actions timetable for GPE Secretariat actions

Evaluation recommendation #1 for the GPE Secretariat: ***GPE's COVID-19 support was the partnership's first foray into large-scale humanitarian response. An overarching recommendation is therefore to explore the extent to which this should become an institutionalized, core component of GPE's work in the context of potential future emergencies.***

Improvements	Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible GPE Secretariat unit(s)	Follow up	
				Status as of May 2024	Comments
Consider the question of GPE's added value in providing large-scale support to resilient education systems in the development of the 2030 Strategy.	Strategy development process proposal to GPE Board includes an assessment of GPE's added value across the range of contexts of GPE partner countries and vis-à-vis other players in the sector.	June 2024-December 2025	Chief Technical Officer / CTO team	Proposal on strategic questions submitted to Board	

Evaluation recommendation #2 for the GPE Secretariat: ***GPE should explore how its regular operations can support system resilience in GPE partner countries to prepare for future emergencies.***

Improvements	Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Follow up	
				Status as of May 2024	Comments
Explore the need to further strengthen operational support for resilience, in particular in relation to climate change, in GPE2030	Questions on GPE's added value in different contexts, what it means to focus on leaving no one behind, and financing instruments tailored to contexts are included among the strategic questions posed to the Board for the next strategy.	June 2024-December 2025	CTO team & Finance & Grant Operations team	Proposal on strategic questions submitted to Board	

Evaluation recommendation #3 a) b) c) for the GPE Secretariat: ***Three areas related to grant operations and quality assurance:***

3.a) GPE could consider developing a "ready to roll" contingency plan and standard operating procedure, should it be needed for future emergencies. This approach should consider a) the need to balance the high speed achieved through the AF grant approval processes with the need for sufficient quality assurance; b) providing additional technical support to countries facing the harshest circumstances.

3.b) Future emergency responses could adopt a similar [grant] screening process, while creating clearer requirements for targeting vulnerable groups, including girls.

3.c) In future emergencies, mechanisms need to be in place to encourage grant agents to use the flexibility of grant mechanisms to ensure continued relevance of activities to changing contexts and based on emerging evidence.

Improvements	Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Follow up	
				Status as of May 2024	Comments

Improve grant design, quality assurance, and adaptations	Standard operating procedure adapted to ensure government and partners assess the need for adaptations of GPE grants in case of emergencies. Redesigned quality assurances processes for greater efficiency, clearer and simpler decision authorities, and faster turnaround.		FGO	Completed Designed. To be implemented in 2024	
	Quality assurance framework for accelerated funding, as well as adaptations of programs in situations of crisis, adapted; including specific standards to ensure targeting of vulnerable groups including girls and gender equality more broadly.		FGO	Completed	
	Similar review process adopted as used for the COVID grants for other emergency funding.		FGO	Completed	
	Continue to streamline and improve quality assurance and approval processes through the Deputy CEO led 'Pilates' project, which was launched at the end of 2023.	2023-ongoing	DCEO	Ongoing	

Evaluation recommendation #4 for the GPE Secretariat: ***The GPE Secretariat should formulate an approach based on growing evidence [on remote learning] on how technology could be deployed for continued learning given varying technology capacity in countries and their aspirations for leveraging technology.***

Improvements	Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Follow up	
				Status as of May 2024	Comments
Work with partners to develop context-appropriate approaches to embedding EdTech in teaching/learning strategies	Roll out Ed4 Tech Technical Assistance Initiative in 2-4 pilot countries	2024-2025	PT/CTO team/ regional teams	About to launch (May 2024) - Pilots soon to be launched in 2 initial countries	1M US$ allocated with Board approval pending for an additional 2M

Evaluation recommendation #5 for the GPE Secretariat: ***Three areas related to grant monitoring:***

5.a) Future grant mechanisms (whether under emergency circumstances or not) should encourage grant agents to track whether interventions are reaching beneficiaries.

5.b) Greater Secretariat oversight of progress and completion reports (in addition to the use of evidence throughout implementation), to ensure that the reports comply with M&E guidelines and the data presented is complete, can help improve the quality of reporting.

5.c) Improved guiding questions, checklists and definitions could be featured in grant reporting guidelines to ensure a more grounded assessment.

Improvements	Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Follow up	
				Status as of May 2024	Comments
Improve grant monitoring	Developed standard simplified templates on the different grants which, in addition to requiring reporting on beneficiaries reached and other standard indicators, focuses on identifying implementation issues		FGO	Completed	
	Created an online reporting tool to enhance compliance with reporting requirements and simplify data collection and verification		FGO	Completed	
	Continue to streamline and improve monitoring and reporting through the Deputy CEO led 'Pilates' project, which was launched at the end of 2023.	2023-ongoing	DCEO	Ongoing	
Evaluation recommendation #6 for the GPE Secretariat: ***For global/cross-national grants producing knowledge goods, concerns with reporting data might be easily met if visualization and download data were required for completion reports and regular monitoring***					
Improvements	**Key action(s)**	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**	**Follow up**	
				Status as of May 2024	**Comments**
Require that access and download data of publicly available knowledge products be included in completion reports for similar types of initiatives.	Ongoing work with KIX and EOL grant agents to improve public access to/communication around knowledge products – these are integral elements of these programs.		Partnerships Team	Ongoing	
	Ensure that future knowledge mechanisms also require access data.		TBD		

Annex 2 – About GPE secretariat's management responses and related action planning, in the context of evaluations

- GPE evaluations aim to support learning for program and strategy improvement as well as for accountability. Thus, management responses to evaluations and related action planning are a key part of the learning and accountability process, with the aim of improving GPE support to system transformation based on tangible evaluative evidence.
- Management responses and action plans provide an on-paper, agreed-upon, and structured set of responses as well as actions tied to these, including timelines, responsibilities, and follow-up status over time for stakeholders' awareness.
- Each evaluation management/action plan response is required to be completed within 2 months of the finalization of each evaluation that is part of the GPE Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning framework, or of any other GPE-funded evaluation that is critical to the GPE Secretariat or Board's decision making (which is to be determined on an individual basis). If an evaluation yields more than one report during its cycle, the frequency of evaluation responses for that particular evaluation is to be determined by the Management Team
- The management response/action plan process is managed by the Results and Performance (R&P) team. The response/plan are to be developed by the GPE Secretariat program/technical staff (or cross teams) leading the evaluated program/initiative/mechanism, with support from the R&P team as needed. Other internal/stakeholders may be involved in the development of the response as needed and if required by the Management Team. Engagement modalities to ensure such collective inputs will be tailored by evaluation.
- Each new management response/plan is to be reviewed by the manager responsible for the evaluated program/initiative/mechanism, then approved by the Secretariat's MT.
- The R&P team will follow-up of the individual actions on an annual basis (timing TBD) using the 'Follow up' columns in Annex 1's. Updates on progress vis-a-vis the action plan will be shared for information and action in the annual GPE results report (RR) and with the Management Team.
- All management responses as well as annual follow ups will be shared with PILC and posted on the GPE website.
- If the evaluators did not provide recommendation(s) addressing important finding(s) or piece of evidence from the report, the GPE Secretariat program/technical staff preparing the response may decide to develop additional actions in their response to address these critical findings, supplementary to the actions addressing the recommendations.
- Process:

