

GPE EVALUATION POLICY TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED LEARNING AND ACTIONS

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Introduction and Scope

The Evaluation Policy (“the policy”) is intended to support the implementation of GPE 2025 and is a key aspect of the partnership’s commitment to capacity development and learning from evidence. It should be read in tandem with [GPE’s Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework](#), an operational pillar of the strategic plan. The policy will be reviewed periodically to align with subsequent strategies.

The policy informs stakeholders of the purposes, principles, criteria, and standards in GPE-financed evaluations. It strengthens the commitment to using evaluation evidence across all GPE programming and processes. It ensures that all partners are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to commissioning, managing, conducting, utilizing, and learning from evaluation evidence to strengthen our collective contributions to the goal and objectives of the partnership.

Definition and Purposes of Evaluation within GPE

Drawing on the definition of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD DAC) and the United Nations Evaluation Group’s (UNEG) guidelines, this policy defines evaluation as a periodic, systematic, and objective assessment of an on-going or completed intervention, project, program, or policy, its design, implementation, and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives; the coherence of the intervention; as well as the efficiency, effectiveness (including cost-effectiveness), and impact of the intervention, project, program, and policy, and sustainability of its results. An evaluation analyzes the achievement of both expected and unexpected results, by examining the results chain, implementation processes, and contextual factors, and causality or contribution, using appropriate criteria and methodologies (OECD DAC; UNEG).

Evaluation within GPE serves three primary purposes: accountability and decision-making (within the partnership) and evidence-based learning (across the partnership and its stakeholders).

GPE 2025 places special emphasis on the use of evaluations for supporting experimentation, testing, adapting, and scaling innovations, driving transformation to deliver equitable and quality education, and guiding decisions and actions, especially at the country level.

GPE undertakes both country-led and secretariat-led evaluations, both of which are subject to the principles, criteria, and standards articulated in this policy. The typology of both sets of evaluation is presented in Appendix 1.

Secretariat-led evaluations are planned, performed or commissioned, and managed by the Secretariat's Results and Performance Team following approval of an overall evaluation workplan by the Board. Country-led evaluations are those that are undertaken at the country level by GPE country-level partners and are agreed to under GPE financial and non-financial instruments. The evaluations may be undertaken by partner governments, grant agents, or other recipients of GPE funding, and may be financed with GPE funds.

Principles of Evaluation in GPE

GPE follows international principles for its evaluation work and supplements those with an emphasis on gender equality and inclusion. All partners are responsible for upholding this interrelated set of principles in their GPE-funded evaluations.

Independence and Impartiality. GPE's overall partnership evaluation function is embedded in the Secretariat, as one part of its core management and administrative roles. Similarly, country-led evaluations are implemented or commissioned and managed at the country level by GPE's partners. Independence and impartiality are therefore not achieved through organizational independence in every evaluation but through measures that assure behavioral independence and impartiality in the commissioning, management, design, implementation, quality assurance, and completion of all evaluations.

- Behavioral independence implies freedom from political influence and organizational pressure, including pressure from members of the GPE Board, the Secretariat and other GPE partners. It is ensured by allowing those conducting the evaluations full access to information and full autonomy in carrying out research, analysis, and reporting.
- Impartiality implies that steps are taken to ensure that conflicts of interest are declared and mitigated in the commissioning, management, conduct, and completion of evaluations; and that the evaluators are free from bias (see also *Minimum standards*).

For the Secretariat-led evaluation program, behavioral independence is upheld by the manager of the Results and Performance Team and with a ring-fenced multi-

year budget approved by the Board for the duration of each GPE strategic period.

For the country-led evaluation program, the compact and grant completion reviews, which are considered to be self-evaluations and are governed through the compact and grant completion guidelines, the principles of independence and impartiality will be upheld by the Local Education Group and the grant agent, respectively. For other types of evaluations, the partner responsible for commissioning or managing the evaluation will uphold independence and impartiality by instituting robust quality assurance and review procedures and providing a budget commensurate with the purposes and design of the evaluation (also see credibility below).

In cases where the country-led and Secretariat-led evaluations are commissioned with a requirement for a greater degree of institutional independence, Independent Review Panels should be established to offer scientific review and/or oversight of evaluation design, implementation, and deliverables and to report their assessment of the quality of the evaluation to the commissioning body.

Credibility. Evaluation credibility is grounded in addressing relevant questions with expertise, objectivity, transparency, rigorous methodology, and an adequate budget. To be credible, evaluation methodologies must be appropriate and complete. In practice this means that all GPE partners commit to applying appropriate and scientifically rigorous methodologies accepted in the evaluation discipline, including impact evaluations, to generate evidence and to ensuring that findings and conclusions are warranted based on the evidence generated. Credibility demands the application of appropriate quality assurance mechanisms, including:

- Appropriate and transparent selection procedures for: 1) identifying and appointing or creating an evaluation team with relevant subject matter and technical expertise and experience to conduct the evaluation and engage stakeholders in evidence-based learning; and 2) ensuring that no conflicts-of-interest exist that would impede independence and impartiality.
- Key stakeholders' review of and feedback on main evaluation products (inception report, draft findings, final findings). Stakeholders include evaluation commissioners and those who would use evaluation findings and recommendations (including grant agents, Ministries of education, and coordinating agencies).

- Independent expert panel's (when established for fully independent evaluations commanding a higher degree of accountability) review, and the evaluation teams' own internal quality assurance mechanisms, to ensure the methodological rigor of the evaluation approach, the robustness of the evidence underlying the findings and recommendations, the findings and recommendations follow logically from the evidence, and feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the recommendations.

Transparency. The principle of transparency safeguards and incentivizes independence, impartiality, and credibility in evaluations. It implies a commitment to full disclosure of all plans and management arrangements for an evaluation (including open solicitation of evaluators using published and disseminated terms of reference). All GPE evaluations should be posted publicly and, when not directly commissioned by the Secretariat, be published by the commissioning partners and deposited with the Secretariat so that it can make these available to the public. GPE follows the World Bank Policy on Access to Information. Quantitative evaluation data, when collected, should be anonymized and made available to the public upon request, with required data protection protocols in place.

Utilization for Learning. Evaluation utility refers to the relevance and timeliness of evaluations for the purposes of decision-making, accountability, and learning so that the findings can be used to improve the education experiences and outcomes for every child. Utility is enhanced by ensuring that each evaluation responds to the learning and decision-making needs of specific GPE partners, and that evaluations are planned as part of an overall cycle of learning among GPE partners.

Ethical Principles. All GPE evaluations must adhere to the highest ethical principles. All parties responsible for commissioning, managing, and conducting evaluations funded by GPE are responsible for ensuring safeguarding and ethical conduct at all stages of evaluation through the ways outlined below.

Informed consent must be secured from all participants providing data for GPE-funded evaluations. All participants must be made aware that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw their consent at any time with no negative consequences. Consent from parents or guardians as well as individual assent is required from children or other vulnerable individuals who cannot provide consent on their own. All evaluations should record procedures used for informed consent.

Confidentiality and privacy should be maintained for all individuals with clear

procedures for their assurance laid out in plans for data collection, analysis, and storage. If an evaluation collects attributable statements from informants utilized in the evaluation products, this should be included in procedures for informed consent along with opportunities to verify attributed statements.

Safeguarding must be included in evaluation plans. Evaluation plans should assess any potential harms to participants or their communities that may arise due to participation in an evaluation and propose reasonable mitigations. All evaluation team members should be trained in ethical safeguarding of human subjects and all institutions undertaking evaluations should have clear policies on safeguarding and protection of human subjects.

Respect for cultural sensitivities and human rights should be integrated into all stages and types of evaluation. This principle includes using language most appropriate for those providing data, for stakeholder feedback, as well as for disseminating and sharing findings.

Finally, evaluation-related country-level protocols must be followed as part of designing and implementing the evaluations.

Participation of Beneficiaries. GPE is a multi-stakeholder partnership. As a general evaluation principle, therefore, GPE encourages attention to the diverse views and experiences of institutional beneficiaries and the beneficiary children and educators that its programs aim to reach. It also encourages obtaining relevant feedback from other country level stakeholders and civil society involved in a policy, program or project being evaluated. Participation can include providing feedback on evaluation questions and design, providing information essential for the evaluation, and providing inputs regarding the implications of the evaluation findings.

Gender Equality and Inclusion. GPE's commitment to gender equality, equity, and inclusion must also be upheld as a key principle in its evaluation approach, including the composition of evaluation teams. All evaluations must examine whether and how the interventions, programs, and policies evaluated support or otherwise affect gender equality, equity, and inclusion.

Capacity Development. GPE requires evaluation practices that strengthen national capacity to conduct and learn from evaluations. These aims shall be achieved, for example by commissioning evaluations that are either led by institutions from partner countries or that include such institutions and partner country experts in the evaluation teams and independent technical panels.

Joint Evaluation. GPE supports joint evaluations with partners where possible, when such evaluations can contribute to better coordination and collaborative learning within the partnership, thereby contributing to building an effective partnership focused on results. Such evaluations should follow the principles, criteria, and standards laid out in GPE's Evaluation Policy.

Evaluation Criteria

All GPE commissioned and funded evaluations should address, in whole or in part, the evaluation criteria articulated below (based on OECD DAC)¹. Additional evaluation criteria may be adopted on a case-by-case basis or as a response to new developments in international best practice. The word intervention below encompasses interventions, projects, programs, and policies.

- **Relevance:** The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries² global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.
- **Coherence:** The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector, or institution.
- **Effectiveness:** The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups. Within GPE, it is important to focus specifically on differential results by gender and marginalized children (due to disability, ethnicity, poverty, or other factors). An assessment of cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis should be considered as part of this criterion (also see efficiency below).
- **Efficiency:** The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.
- **Impact (intended and unintended):** The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant intended higher-level effects. This concept also covers effects that were not anticipated in advance, which can be both negative and positive and are important to identify and document to further understanding of the full costs and benefits of the

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf>

² Beneficiaries is defined as, "the individuals, groups, or organisations, whether targeted or not, that benefit directly or indirectly, from the development intervention." Other terms, such as rights holders or affected people, may also be used.

intervention.

- **Sustainability:** The extent to which the net benefits of the interventions continue or are likely to continue.

Minimum Standards for Commissioning and Funding Evaluations

GPE-funded evaluations should meet minimum standards for evaluation planning and commissioning, quality assurance and management, and reporting and use.

Evaluation Planning and Commissioning. All GPE-funded evaluations should have an evaluation plan that includes a budget and has an explicit focus on learning. The evaluation can be registered with the GPE Secretariat (except for compact and grant completion reviews, which are submitted to the Secretariat when they have been finalized). Evaluations should be commissioned from independent firms or consultants based on formal terms of reference that indicate the evaluation questions, scope, methodology expected (in broad terms), and expertise required for carrying out the evaluation. Terms of reference should be public and widely disseminated and follow the procurement policies of GPE or the Grant Agent. A transparent selection process should be established using clear criteria, and information about the selected evaluators should be made public. Potential conflicts of interest among evaluators should be formally assessed, based on a conflict of interest disclosure.

Quality Assurance and Management of Evaluation Impartiality. All GPE-funded evaluations should be accompanied by an evaluation management plan that ensures adequate procedures for quality assurance and safeguarding of evaluation impartiality. Such measures should include, at minimum, a process to ensure that conflicts of interest have been avoided through the exclusion of GPE staff or the staff of partner organizations and their service providers in the evaluation team when such staff they have been responsible for the design, implementation, or supervision of the initiative to be evaluated.

They may also include internal peer review processes; the use of an independent scientific review panel; or, in the case of especially high-stakes evaluations with potential conflict of interest with the commissioner of the evaluation, the appointment of an arms-length independent panel to set the terms of reference for the evaluation, select the evaluation provider, and ensure that quality and

impartiality are protected throughout the evaluation process.

Evaluation Reporting and Learning. All GPE-funded evaluations should include a plan for their public reporting, dissemination, utilization, and learning. In keeping with the [Access to Information Policies of the World Bank](#), all evaluations should be disseminated publicly with full disclosure of all non-confidential information. It is the responsibility of partners commissioning evaluations to ensure that every evaluation funded by GPE is submitted to the GPE Secretariat within six months of completion to contribute to knowledge and learning across the partnership. Key evaluation findings should be clearly communicated and made available to all stakeholders by the organization that has managed the evaluation, together with implications of the findings to assist with learning from the evaluations.

Roles and Responsibilities

Evaluation is a shared responsibility across GPE. This section lays out the roles and responsibilities of the main actors within the partnership. All partners and teams commissioning, managing, designing, and implementing evaluations have the responsibility to adhere to the principles, criteria, and standards outlined in this policy. In addition, all partners have the responsibility to promote the use of evaluations in decision-making, accountability, and learning across the partnership.

GPE Board and Committees. The GPE Board of Directors is responsible for approving the partnership's evaluation policy. It establishes an Independent Panel to commission and oversee periodic strategic and summative evaluations of the partnership. The Board may request evidence and evaluations regarding the interventions, programs, and policies it funds through GPE grants, with such requests being funded and managed through the grant itself. The Board and its committees use evaluations to inform their decision-making and to learn about and strengthen GPE's interventions, projects, programs, and policies. They play an active role in supporting adaptive decision-making and learning needs of the partnership, with a focus on accelerating educational progress at the country level and achieving GPE's strategic goals. The Performance, Impact, and Learning Committee has the specific responsibility to oversee the implementation of GPE's monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework and to facilitate partnership-wide learning from data and evidence.

Country Partners. Both through their participation in constituencies of the GPE

board, and as recipients of GPE funding grants and programs, country partners play an important and leading role in demanding, approving, contributing to, managing, using, and learning from GPE-financed evaluations, so that evidence informs their policies and programming. They ensure that GPE-financed evaluations serve their decision-making and learning needs, including for testing, adapting, and scaling effective policies, programs, and interventions, with a focus on accelerating educational progress in their countries. GPE country partners, in collaboration with the grant agents, play an active role in demanding evaluations, determining the objectives and design of the evaluations, and identifying how the evaluations will inform the improvement of their education systems. The country partners also provide data and information in a timely manner to evaluators and to offer their views as stakeholders in the policy, program, or intervention being evaluated. Finally, country partners play an important role in ensuring the dissemination and use of GPE evaluations beyond the partnership.

Grant Agents. Each grant agent has its own system of governance and rules and regulations governing the monitoring and evaluation activities for the grants it manages on behalf of GPE. Grant agents are responsible for ensuring that interventions, projects, programs, and policies supported with GPE financing are designed with adequate monitoring plans, results frameworks, and evaluation plans that comply with GPE guidelines on monitoring, completion reviews, and evaluations as agreed-upon in the grant documents. Grant agents, together with implementing partners, will align their evaluation questions and evaluation plans to include reference to GPE strategic objectives and in response to the request for evidence by the GPE Board. They should also ensure that evaluations support national capacity, engagement of relevant policymakers, program implementers, civil society, and others at key moments in the evaluation process, and that evaluations are widely disseminated for learning across the partnership and support the uptake of evaluation recommendations. Grant management agencies are expected to register their plans for evaluation with the GPE Secretariat and submit completed evaluations, within six months, to the Secretariat for wider dissemination and utilization.

GPE Secretariat. The GPE Secretariat's Results and Performance Team establishes the operational guidelines for GPE-financed mandatory evaluation activities within the partnership. The team is also the primary body responsible for planning, commissioning, and managing all Secretariat-led evaluations. The team reports

to the Board and its Committees on evaluation findings, ensures dissemination, and provides opportunities for evidence-informed decision-making and learning across the partnership. In relation to country-led evaluations, the Results and Performance team ensures that all grant agents and other partners are aware of GPE's Evaluation Policy and aligns support through the established strategic partnership to support monitoring, evaluation and learning in GPE partner countries.

GPE Secretariat's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for fostering a culture of learning from evaluations and the use of evaluation evidence in decision-making. S/he is responsible for reviewing the evaluation work-program on a periodic basis. The CEO ensures that management decisions in response to evaluations are timely and followed through based on an action plan.

The wider GPE Secretariat supports evaluations by engaging in the planning of Secretariat-led and country-led evaluations (as needed), providing relevant data and evidence as required by the evaluators, supporting the dissemination and utilization of evaluations, and monitoring the implementation of country-level evaluations as part of grant monitoring. The Secretariat also has responsibility to ensure that all country-led evaluation teams and grant managers are aware of the need to adhere to the principles, criteria, and standards laid out in this policy.

The Secretariat is also responsible for using the evidence from evaluation in new programming and adaptive management of current GPE programs.

Appendix 1. GPE Evaluation Policy: Typology of Evaluations

GPE finances both Secretariat- and country-led evaluations. GPE utilizes several complementary oversight and performance management activities to guide its work, including audits, financial and grant implementation monitoring, reviews, audits, and related research. Such activities provide an important source of evaluative evidence and are often used as foundational materials for evaluations. The evaluation policy however is not intended to guide these other activities, as they are governed through a dedicated set of operational policies and guidelines and are folded into the secretariat and partners' regular work program.

Secretariat-led Evaluations

The Secretariat's evaluation portfolio includes (but is not limited to) the following types of evaluations:

- Thematic outcomes-focused evaluations to study the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of GPE contributions (financing and other support) to GPE priority areas: learning, access, gender equality, inclusion, teaching quality, organizational capacity, and domestic financing. Using a cross-country approach, such evaluations can identify the factors that facilitated or hindered the design and implementation of the interventions, programs, and policies targeted at the priority areas. In addition, such the evaluations focus on whether and how GPE support contributes to transformations, innovations, and sustainability of the results.
- Process and programmatic evaluations to provide a holistic view of the effectiveness of GPE's operational model, financing instruments, and strategic partnership programs. This set of studies includes country-level evaluations to assess the effectiveness of GPE's country-level engagement and the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of GPE's operational model and partnership in upholding the partnership principles and delivering results.
- Strategic summative evaluations that take stock of GPE's contributions to the overall goal and priority areas, the efficiency of GPE's grants and processes, and the value added of the GPE partnership at both the global and the country levels. The logistics and procurement of this evaluation are managed by the GPE Results and Performance team, but the evaluation itself is commissioned by the Board with oversight by an independent technical advisory committee working with, and reporting to, the Board. Such reviews draw on the set of monitoring and evaluation included in the secretariat- and country-led programs, with the purpose of informing all stakeholders about progress in education in GPE countries (and how the partnership contributed to that progress), and progress in the partnership itself. The information from such strategic evaluations inform Board decisions regarding the future governance, strategy, and financing of the partnership.
- Systematic summaries of GPE-funded requirements assessments and evaluations conducted in partner countries, such as those undertaken in the compact requirement areas and grants under GPE's 2025 operational model.

Country-Led Evaluations

Country-led evaluations are those that are undertaken at the country level by GPE country-level partners and are agreed to under GPE financial and non-financial instruments. GPE2025 commits GPE to embedding monitoring, evaluation, and learning to drive systematic learning on the delivery of impact at scale, with country-led evaluations and learning as a key feature of this process. Evaluations may be undertaken by partner governments, grant agents, or other recipients of GPE funding (for example partners implementing the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange and Education Out Loud programs).

Country-led evaluations include (but are not limited to) the following types of evaluations:

- **Compact periodic review.** This review comprises a structured review of progress on the decisions and agreements between the country partner and other partners at the country level that are articulated in the compact. The reviews are generally and primarily objectives-focused and provide an assessment of the achievement of the actions and results agreed to in the compact document, using the GPE compact progress review guidelines and format. The purpose is to assess the coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness of the compact, including its effectiveness as an instrument to drive partnership alignment and effectiveness.
- **Grant completion review.** This review comprises a summative assessment of the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the GPE financed interventions, projects, and programs, based primarily on an objectives-focused methodology and against a results framework specified in the grant. All grants will be subject to a grant completion review, using the GPE grant completion guidelines and format.

Partner countries and grant agents can further undertake process and outcome/impact evaluations with GPE financing. The specific methodologies underpinning these evaluations should be determined by the nature of the evaluation questions and could comprise a range of established social science research approaches: experimental, quasi-experimental, objectives-based, process-tracing, and so forth.

- **Process evaluations.** These evaluations will review the relevance and efficiency of GPE-supported processes and intervention implementation modalities, such as those focused on reforms and organizational improvements, that may not yet have

achieved specific longer-term results such as improved teaching and learning. These can also include the effectiveness and coherence of partners' alignment to support country systems and results.

- Outcome and impact evaluations. These evaluations will assess the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, including cost-effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and unintended consequences of specific interventions and policies within a project or program funded through GPE grants.

See for example the following studies that focus on cost-effectiveness:

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

A Note on Contribution and Causal Analyses

The GPE fund is one of many sources of financing for developing country partners, and the results the country aims to achieve with GPE financing are often dependent on additional financing and activities from many other partners and stakeholders. For this reason, GPE evaluations recognize joint contributions and generally cannot specifically attribute outcomes and impact, especially at the sectoral level, to GPE financing alone. This situation applies to pooled financing, which GPE strives to support in all countries. Nonetheless, in some cases impact evaluations using credible counterfactuals and process tracing methodologies may be used to answer cause and effect questions about outcomes and impact tied to interventions and policies specifically supported with GPE financing and processes alone.

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