TOOL FOR STRENGTHENING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL EDUCATION GROUPS

USER GUIDANCE

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GPE Transforming Education

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In GPE partner countries, governments and education partners form coordination groups to engage in policy dialogue to promote improved education systems and results. Having different names in different countries, these groups are referred to by GPE as local education groups. Often established independently of GPE, they are country-owned and country-led groups that enable harmonized, consultative sector policy dialogue.

As a global and country level partnership, GPE is based on the premise that effective local education groups lead to better education outcomes for children. This tool for strengthening the effectiveness of local education groups is available to partner countries as part of GPE's enhanced support to sector coordination, recognized in the partnership's new strategy – **GPE 2025** – as an enabler for system transformation. The tool is designed to facilitate focused dialogue within local education groups around their purpose, strengths and areas for improvement. More specifically, the tool can support education group members in:

- Identifying policy dialogue functions and coordinated actions that add the most value to the education sector
- Identifying strengths and bottlenecks in current education group arrangements, partnership dynamics and capacities for sector coordination
- Clarifying member roles, responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities
- Agreeing on prioritized action plans for improving the education group's effectiveness

Through the **GPE Effective Partnership Rollout**, the tool has been trialed over a six-month period with the engagement of stakeholders in 14 partner countries and subsequently revised following user feedback. It can be used by *all* local education groups (or equivalent mechanisms for policy dialogue and sector coordination)— irrespective of current sector dialogue and coordination practices, whether the local education group is emerging or well defined, and how well it is functioning — and is structured around three core dimensions (see figure 1) associated with effective multi-stakeholder partnerships. Each of these dimensions contains features that are considered important to an effective education group and are examined through use of the tool. This diagnostic exercise is intended to be a *self-assessment*, meaning that it is undertaken by stakeholders themselves, as opposed to being conducted by a third party (external).

Figure 1. Three dimensions of local education group effectiveness

HOW TO USE THE TOOL

This guidance note facilitates use of the tool for the organization and conducting of assessments that are needs-focused, agile and feasible, and best fit the context of the education group. It builds on pilot experiences, identifying steps (see figure 2) and considerations that have proven useful for the successful application of the tool in different country contexts.

The step-by-step guidance supports decision making prior to, and following, the assessment. As such, it is meant to be a useful guide to orient leaders and task teams responsible for organizing and overseeing the self-assessments process. The actual tool is provided separately, in three parts.

QUICK LINKS

STRATEGIC VALUE[1]

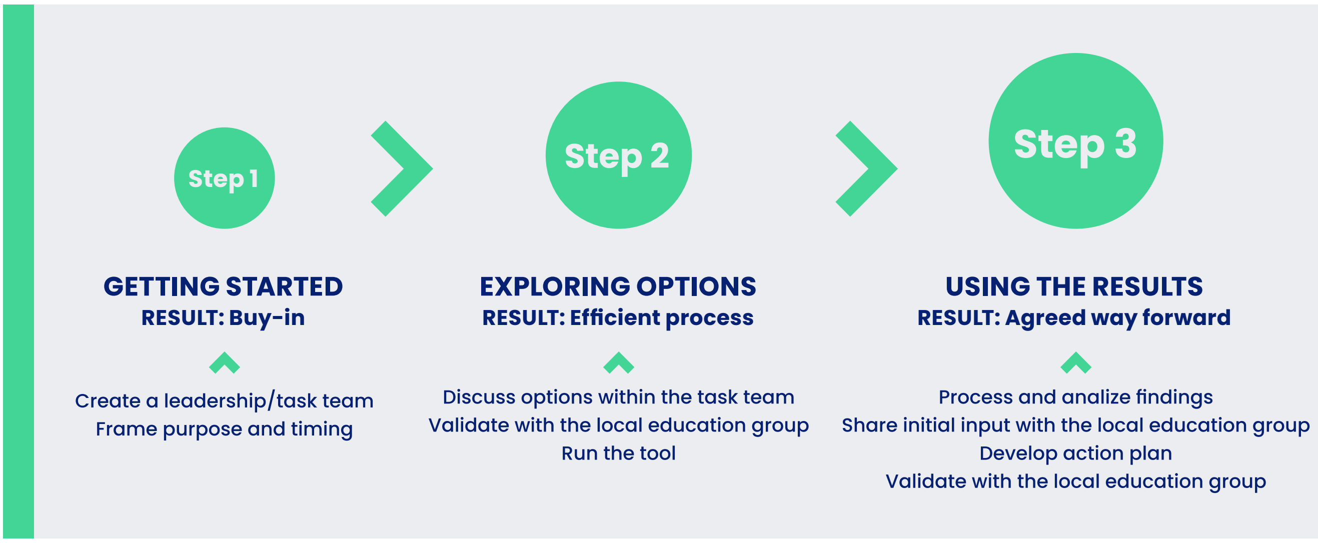
COLLABORATIVE CAPACITIES[2]

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES[3]

More specifically, the guidance can support education group members or teams in:

- generating *buy-in* and *clarity* around the assessment's purpose and timing
- ensuring that *suitable modalities* are chosen for an efficient process
- *leveraging the results* toward an agreed way forward and improvement strategies

Figure 2. Overview for conducting the assessment



1. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/tool-strengthening-effectiveness-local-education-groups-focus-strategic-value
2. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/tool-strengthening-effectiveness-local-education-groups-focus-collaborative-capacities
3. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/tool-strengthening-effectiveness-local-education-groups-focus-organizational-capacities

Getting started

Step 1

Local education group leaders may be the first to discuss the potential purpose or value of a local education group self-assessment. To move things forward, creating a leadership group or task team that considers why and how the tool will be used can help reduce transaction costs and lay the foundations for a purposeful, efficient, rigorous and well-coordinated exercise with meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Create a leadership group or task team

The designation of a leadership group or task team that is government led and representative of the education group has proven useful in laying the groundwork (and building support) for review and coordination of the overall exercise and securing any needed resources. The team may consider the questions in box 1 to guide its early discussions on how to use the tool.

Box 1. Key questions to consider in planning the assessment

- Is there an appetite for an assessment and a sense of how the diagnostic tool could help the local education group collaborate better, be better organized/structured and be better prioritized?
- Is this interest shared by all education group members or driven by a few? In the latter case, how will leadership and broad stakeholder engagement be secured?
- Are there any challenges toward mobilizing different stakeholder groups that could be addressed in the planning of the assessment? For example, do members have specific commitments, constraints or sector responsibilities that may impede their participation?
- Are there policy dialogue-related events or developments that can be leveraged to conduct the assessment; for example, to feed into planned diagnostic (joint sector) review or evaluation?
- Will external support or specific resources be needed; for example, to facilitate dialogue, data collection or reporting?

Frame the purpose and agree on timing within the local education group

It will be key for the leadership team to consult with the education group members to ensure collective agreement on the assessment's relevance, strategic purpose and timing. Consultation increases the likelihood that members will remain engaged and buy into any decisions taken on the assessment approach later (see box 2). It will also make clear what time commitments are needed for engaging in the process.

The purpose of the assessment will depend on many factors, including current sector dialogue and coordination practices, whether the local education group is emerging or well defined, and how well it is functioning.

Box 2. Possible motivations for using the tool

Experiences collected during the pilot phase showed that stakeholder motivations to conduct an assessment were driven by one or more of the following objectives:

- To reinvigorate stakeholder engagement in sector dialogue, and improve ways of working for a more meaningful and impactful dialogue and coordination across structures and types of partners
- To generate deeper conversations on the local education group mandate, objectives, priorities and collaboration mechanisms with a view to reviewing or establishing **terms of reference** (or the equivalent)
- To strengthen the group as a sector support mechanism in the context of education sector analysis or education sector plan development
- To identify organizational and collaborative strengths and weaknesses and establish baselines for future reviews of sector coordination mechanisms; for example, as part of a joint sector review process, education sector reporting or a GPE grant applications process
- To leverage existing and untapped expertise and assets among partners and encourage mutual accountability for effective partnerships

The timing of the actual assessment may be linked to ongoing or upcoming sector processes; for example, broader reviews or sector planning, reporting and monitoring schedules. Tying the exercise to these kinds of events/junctures has proven to be an incentive for leadership and stakeholder engagement and buy-in, but the assessment can be undertaken at any point in the year that fits the local education group's calendar. Here it should be emphasized that the assessment need not be an extensive exercise if country conditions and time do not allow for this; a less comprehensive and/or quicker approach can still prove invaluable in ascertaining the effectiveness of the local education group as well as areas for improvement.

Exploring options

Step 2

The leadership team should discuss the variables that may have an influence on how the assessment is conducted, such as the scope and methodology and who to include, and should consider which options are the most relevant and feasible to successfully run the exercise.

Discuss options within the task team for using the tool and its results

The guidance in figure 3 can be used by the team to plan the exercise. This should also include discussion on how insights and outputs will be used to support the review's intended purposes.

Figure 3. Overview: Options for conducting the assessment

VARIABLES	OPTIONS
Scope	**Comprehensive.** Covering all three dimensions of the self-assessment tool **More targeted.** Covering one or two dimensions of the tool
Inclusion	**Broad participation**. Involving a cross-section of all stakeholder groups **Selected group**. Conducted by a smaller representative group **Other**. Also consider other stakeholders (not currently active or included)
Approach	**Collective**. Participants complete the assessment within a workshop setting **Individual**. Participants feed into the exercise independently **Hybrid**. Participants prepare individually prior to collective discussion
Format	**Use tool as is**. Ready for group settings and individual offline use **Adapt tool**. Customizing for online use and aggregation of (anonymous) responses
Methodology	**Quantitative**. Using the rating scale for assessing practice/feature/behavior **Qualitative**. Using findings from dialogue/discussions or interviews
Output	**Results charts.** Overview of scores by assessed areas **Summary report**. Brief or detailed report summarizing findings **Slide deck**. PowerPoint as main output or supplementary

Scope

The assessment is being undertaken to obtain important insights from stakeholders on the local education group's strategic, organizational and collaborative effectiveness. Every question in the tool (whether employing a rating or open-ended question—see "methodology" below) should play a direct role in reaching that goal. At the same time, the scope should be relevant to the education group's experiences, focused on needs, and manageable.

In countries with newer local education groups, or where the group has never undertaken a review, task teams may wish to pursue a *comprehensive* review including all three dimensions (strategic, organizational and collaborative), or choose to *target* the exercise at one or two of the dimensions. For some, the diagnostic tool will be ready to use "as is"; in other cases, task teams may prefer to customize the tool, in on specific questions, adapting questions, or adding their own (see "format" below).

Annex 1 can facilitate the scoping process and offers a quick overview of common features found in effective local education groups.

Inclusion

For the assessment to be useful for gauging the education group's strengths and weaknesses and informing the design of improvement strategies, it should reflect the inputs and perspectives of a representative group of members, either through the engagement of the broader membership or through a smaller representative group. To the extent possible, participation should be extended not just to education stakeholders who lead and coordinate education sector dialogue and coordination bodies, but also to those with an interest in such groups (including government officials, coordinating/lead agencies, multi- and bilateral development partners, civil society organizations and coalitions, teacher representatives, education sector professionals and community education providers, as well as the private sector and philanthropic foundations).

Depending on the context, some stakeholder groups may not currently be part of, or actively engaged with, the education group but should still be considered for inclusion in the assessment, including stakeholders at decentralized/regional levels.

Approach

Decisions on approaches to running the assessment should be based on their potential to optimize stakeholder inclusion and engagement. Bearing in mind the country situation (for example, COVID-19 restrictions), time and resources available, geographical distance, connectivity or other issues that pose barriers to members' participation, task teams might consider whether to:

- Run the review *collectively* in a group setting or series of meetings (smaller group, focus groups, workshop setting with break-out groups as necessary to deepen the dialogue)
- Run the review *individually* in an online (or low-tech/paper-based) survey format (which can be comprehensive or targeted and anonymous if deemed necessary)
- Use a combination (for example, individual responses prior to collective meeting)

Format

The tool comes in an **interactive PDF** format (links on **p. 2**) and can be used as is - projected in meeting settings (such as workshops or focus groups) or on a split screen during online meetings, or for offline individual use. In case the task team wants to adapt the tool for more targeted use (to support collective or individual approaches), an **editable version in Word**[4] with all assessment questions is also available.

Methodology

The diagnostic tool uses a quantitative rating scale to capture the direction and intensity of attitudes towards education group practices/features/behaviors. Depending on the approach chosen, the rating can be applied directly by groups and/or individuals. The tool also includes short sets of optional open-ended (qualitative) questions, allowing participants to deepen insights or clarify their scoring and enabling different voices to be heard. Also note the following options:

- Within meetings/facilitated dialogue: The rating scale can be applied loosely in meeting settings, serving more for facilitators to stimulate, prompt and guide dialogue among members (for example, how much do you agree with this statement, and why?). Using the rating as part of a facilitated discussion generates qualitative information and allows the group to stay focused. To ensure that participants come prepared and engage through the tool, assessment questions should be shared in advance.
- For individual use: Where participants are engaging on an individual basis through interviews or a survey approach (online or offline), responses can be quantitative and qualitative.

Output

It will be important to generate an output that synthesizes what has been captured. Depending on how comprehensive the assessment exercise is intended to be, possible outputs include: an overview of assessment results, a slide deck or PowerPoint presentation, succinct or more extensive report, or a combination of these (see Step 3 for more information).

Validate options with the local education group

Once options have been chosen, the concrete proposal for the assessment will need to be validated with the local education group members. Members may have suggestions or reservations, enabling the leadership team to make adjustments to better align the assessment approach with members' preferences. Validation with the group can be achieved quickly either through exchange of emails or during a regular local education group meeting if the timing fits. Once this is done, the team should go ahead and conduct the assessment as agreed.

4. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/questions-tool-strengthening-effectiveness-local-education-groups-editable-customization

Using the results

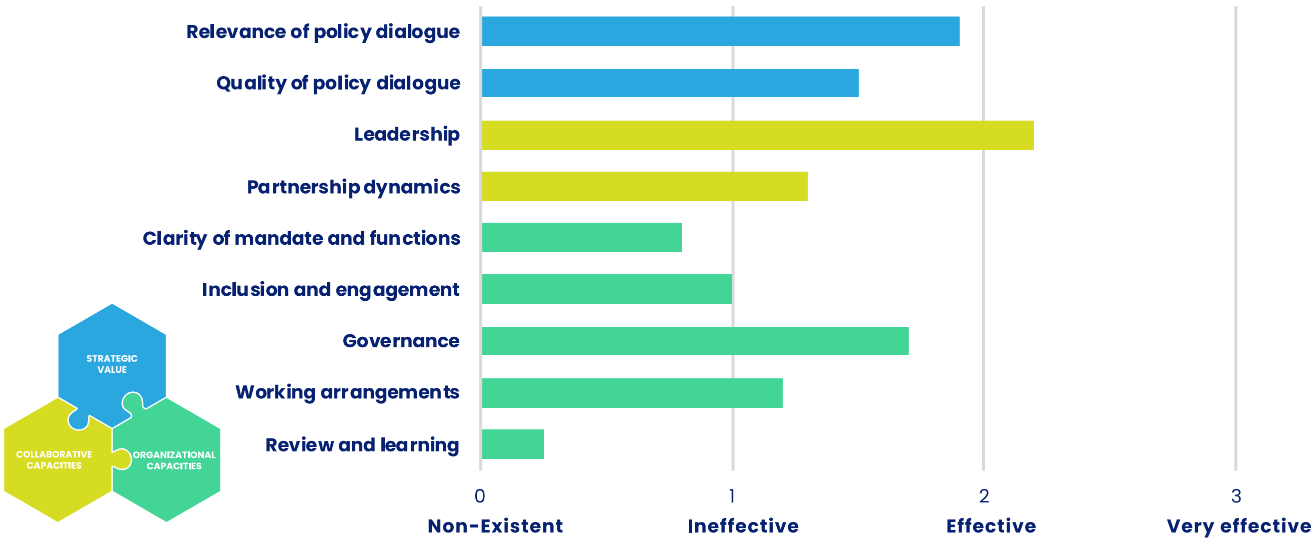
Step 3

Using assessment results to inform change is the most important step but can be the most challenging. This is commonly referred to as "closing the loop." In managing the assessment, it is important for the leadership group to ensure that results are used effectively and appropriately- including through results analysis and participant feedback. Opportunities for change are missed if assessment results are perused without resulting actions.

Process findings and generate initial outputs

The team can use the rating scale to rank and record assessment results that appear to indicate stronger or weaker practices, features and behaviors. To support this, an **Excel tool**[5] is provided with which to enter the assessment values and generate a visual results summary of *quantitative insights (ratings)* from the tool (as shown in figure 4), or in a more detailed summary. These visual snapshots highlight areas potentially needing attention. They can be useful for both sharing the assessment results and kicking off discussions around the formulation of improvement strategies or action plans.

Figure 4. Example of results summary



The *qualitative insights* that have been gathered during the assessment (through use of the tool during meetings, focus groups, interviews, online formats) should also be reviewed and synthesized by the team as part of the write-up of the assessment results. In analyzing the findings, the team, including its leaders, should use their knowledge of country and sector contexts, as well as their professional judgment, to make recommendations on priority areas for improvement.

A **report template**[6] is provided that will enable task teams to generate an output synthesizing what has been captured, combining both the quantitative and qualitative assessment findings. The template can act as a draft document for reporting or communications purposes and be made final once the findings are discussed and approved within the local education group.

5. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/visualizing-local-education-group-assessment-results-support-tool
6. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/using-local-education-group-assessment-results-support-template

Share findings and integrate feedback

Draft outputs, preferably through the report template, should be shared with or circulated to the local education group members with the aim of:

- Understanding whether the findings properly reflect stakeholder perspectives, whether anything needs to be added and/or whether certain results/findings need to be triangulated or contextualized further
- Seeking feedback on key issues identified for prioritization within the local education group and on whether these, or other elements, should reflect actual priorities and why

The sharing and validation of draft findings prior to finalization creates a good assessment experience and can be an important incentive for participants to stay engaged in the action planning process.

Once feedback has been received, the team can finalize the outputs for the assessment (using the report template), including information on what was assessed and how evidence was collected and synthesized. The latter will be important for briefing decision makers and communicating with the broader education community.

Prepare action plans and validate

The ultimate goal of the assessment is to use the insights and results to move policy dialogue and coordination practices forward. The action plan sheet in the report template can assist task teams in transitioning from the assessment findings towards prioritized and realistic actions for strengthening the education group's effectiveness. There should be clarity and consensus on the main actions needed to improve effectiveness, in line with the more specific or general purposes identified for the assessment, with suitable strategies for addressing identified challenges. For example, if "relevance of dialogue" was identified as a priority to address, the action plan may generate a set of actions such as reviewing/adjusting core policy dialogue and coordination functions so that they reflect areas where the local education group can add higher value for its members and the sector, and/or establish a policy dialogue calendar (over the policy cycle) aligned to the agreed functions.

To the extent possible, the formulation of strategies and action plans should involve all local education group members and result in collective agreement. Without member inputs, there is little likelihood of strategies and action plans being implemented. In these plans, there should also be information on who will take up actions, where resources will come from (if needed) and the timeline. The members should then validate any action plans that have been formulated—this last aspect of the assessment process can be timed to be part of a joint education sector review.

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE

Frequently asked questions[7]

7. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/assessment-local-education-groups-frequently-asked-questions

Annex 1: Determining scope

The following can be useful to task teams in deciding on the scope and focus of the assessment. The statements reflect the **Principles toward Effective Local Education Groups** in which the tool is embedded. If team members are unable to offer a clear "yes" to the statements below, they may find it useful to examine related features through the tool and include them in the assessment scope.

Strategic value

Practices are relevant to stakeholders and to driving sector priorities forward
Policy dialogue and coordination practices generate planning, implementation and monitoring efficiencies through coordinated inputs, joint and harmonized actions, and enhanced accountability for results.

The quality of policy dialogue builds on evidence and stakeholder contributions
Sound, responsive decision making is supported by evidence and information regularly contributed by diverse partners and education stakeholders.

Collaborative capacities

Leadership and ownership are demonstrated in practice
Leaders, decision makers and champions set an example from the highest level, demonstrating commitment to participatory sector policy dialogue through their involvement in the local education group.

Key actors contribute to healthy partnership dynamics
The partnership is built on a genuine willingness and commitment of all partners to cooperate in accelerating education sector progress, with recognition of the influence of partnership dynamics on performance and realistic strategies for overcoming obstacles.

Organizational capacities

The mandate and functions are clear and serve the whole policy cycle
A clear mandate and core policy dialogue and coordination functions are agreed by education stakeholders and formalized in a terms of reference (or the equivalent). Specific objectives are aligned to the whole policy cycle, with partners regularly reviewing key priorities.

The partnership framework supports inclusion and meaningful engagement
The education group engages stakeholders at key junctures—including plan development, joint review and monitoring of sector progress and key reform areas, evaluation and learning—with different forms of targeted engagement and supporting the priorities being addressed.

There is a clear governance structure across types of policy dialogue
The governance arrangements of the sector clarify relationships between the local education group and other bodies (including with other sectors), recognizing authorities over different types of policy dialogue and decision making, and establishing clear leadership roles and responsibilities.

Working arrangements are invested and fit-for-purpose
The working arrangements for core and working groups are flexible, adapted to context, and fit for taking priorities forward. They are also well communicated to ensure that members are informed about activities, wider modalities for collaboration, and roles and responsibilities.

There are regular opportunities for learning and review
Opportunities for learning and review support the local education group in understanding whether it is making progress toward its intended mandate and whether its organizational arrangements and collaborative capacities are supporting or hindering success.