



DATA STRATEGY FOR IMPROVED EDUCATION SECTOR PLANNING AND MONITORING

For Decision

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to seek a decision from the Board of Directors on moving towards a comprehensive approach to data within the Global Partnership for Education (“Global Partnership” or “GPE”) that will improve education sector planning and monitoring at all levels.

2. RECOMMENDED DECISION

The Secretariat requests that the Board of Directors approves the following decision:

BOD/2013/11-XX— Data Strategy for Improved Education Sector Planning and Implementation: The Board of Directors:

- a. approves the data strategy for improved education sector planning and monitoring contained in BOD/2013/11 DOC 07;
- b. mandates the Secretariat to ensure systematic focus on data through the GPE process;
- c. requests the Secretariat to develop a proposal for financing education sector analysis by the end of February 2014;
- d. requests the Secretariat to develop a proposal for financing education sector specific public expenditures and financial accountability assessments by the end of February 2014;
- e. requests the Secretariat to develop minimum reporting requirements for monitoring and evaluation in consultation with Supervising Entities and Managing Entities by the end of March 2014; and

- f. requests the Secretariat to update the indicators for the strategic plan by March 2014.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Secretariat recommends moving away from a piecemeal approach towards a more comprehensive approach to data within the Global Partnership. This paper outlines the case for adopting a more comprehensive approach and the initial steps needed for implementation.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 In July 2012, the Board of Directors approved the GPE Strategic Plan 2012-2015. The Plan contains a series of provisional indicators aligned to four Strategic Goals¹ and five Strategic Objectives² to address the intermediate and long-term barriers to achieving quality education and learning for all children. These indicators were meant to capture the information needed to monitor the Plan's progress, assess the support of the partnership, and inform policy making. However, they were not cut in stone and the Board of Directors recognized that more work was needed to address the overall problem of poor data within the education sector.

4.2 As part of the development of an Implementation Plan for the Strategic Plan, a Technical Group on Indicators was tasked to finalize the indicators, and develop a plan to encourage their adoption and the underlying requirements regarding data collection, analysis and reporting.

4.3 In May 2013, the Board of Directors approved the Implementation Plan at its face-to-face meeting in Brussels:

¹ The Strategic Plan outlines four long-term Strategic Goals, namely: (i) access for all; (ii) learning for all; (iii) reaching every child; and (iv) building for the future.

² The objectives are the following: (i) fragile and conflict-affected states able to develop and implement their education plans; (ii) all girls in GPE-endorsed countries successfully complete primary school and go to secondary school in a safe supporting learning environment; (iii) dramatic increase in the number of children learning and demonstrating mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills by Grade 3; (iv) improve teacher effectiveness by training, recruiting and retaining teachers and supporting them to provide a good quality education; and (v) expand the volume, effectiveness, efficiency and equitable allocation of external and domestic funding and support to education in GPE-endorsed countries.

BOD/2013/05-04 – Approval of the Implementation Plan for the Strategic Plan 2012-2015: The Board of Directors:

- a. approves the implementation plan for the Strategic Plan 2012-2015 contained in Annex 1 of BOD/2013/05 DOC 05 (the “Implementation Plan”), including the indicators to measure progress of the plan;
- b. requests the Secretariat to proceed with the further refinement of the work on the impact indicators as outlined in Annex 1 of BOD/2013/05 DOC 05, and report back to the Board at its next face-to-face meeting in November 2013 with concrete recommendations;
- c. reiterates its request in decision BOD/2012/11-02 urging all partners to commit to contributing to the implementation of the Strategic Plan and indicate support for particular deliverables where possible;
- d. requests the Secretariat to report to the Board of Directors on an annual basis, starting with its next face-to-face meeting in November 2013, on progress on the implementation of the Implementation Plan; and
- e. decides that the SPWG shall cease to be operational given the completion of the Strategic Plan and the Implementation Plan.

4.4 The impact indicators referred to in the decision language are those contained in the Strategic Plan and relate to progress made within the education sector in developing country partners. Following the face-to-face meeting of the Board of Directors in Brussels, the Secretariat and some partners reviewed the overall situation on data and indicators and concluded that the identification of core indicators needs to: i) address the broader data issue systematically; ii) be linked to potential improvements to the GPE model and operations; iii) avoid duplication with partners such as UNESCO Institute for Statistics; and iv) take into account the work of the Learning Metrics Task Force. Accordingly, the Secretariat determined that a comprehensive strategy around data and indicators was needed. Such a strategy is contained in this paper.

5. THE CHALLENGE OF DATA FOR THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

5.1 The GPE model is based on the fundamental logic that financial and technical support to ensure a robust education policy process can indeed lead to improved sector policies and ultimately, improved education outcomes. As a result, the Global Partnership needs information on both the education sector and on how GPE's technical and financial support is being utilized to strengthen systems. Building on the experience of partners such as UNESCO and the World Bank, the Global Partnership's data strategy intends to support the collective efforts of its partners to tackle gaps in data on the education sector, learning outcomes and financing.

Education Sector Data: Urgent Progress Needed

5.2 **Better data is needed for developing better policies.** Developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating an education sector policy require good quality data. The development of an effective education policy depends on the identification of the key issues and challenges in the education sector. This requires a thorough education sector analysis, including an in-depth diagnosis of the local sector context, cost and finance, access, learning, equity, efficiency, and system capacity. Reliable data, including financial data, are critical for such an analysis.

Furthermore, strong education sector analyses can provide additional data that are not readily available from international data. However, rigorous education sector analyses are not systematic in the process of developing education sector plans, and indeed this kind of analytical work has become much less common than even five years ago when the Education Program Development Fund ("EPDF") supported such work. This lack of evidence, which results from both the lack of reliable data and rigorous analysis of the education sector, is a real concern for effective policy development. The recent revision of the sourcebook on education sector methodology³ that takes stock of a decade experience of sector analysis in GPE countries provides a high standard and guidance on how this need should be addressed by GPE in the coming years.

³ Education System Analysis Methodological Guidelines (WB, 2013), developed with the support of the World Bank, UNESCO (Pole de Dakar), and UNICEF.

5.3 Better finance and expenditure data is needed to build capacity at country level and move towards more aligned aid modalities. Local Education Group assessment on the choice for best modality of aid to the education sector in GPE countries has used extensively tools and assessments like Public Expenditures and Financial Accountability (“PEFA”) Assessments.⁴ There is a clear need for a more proactive use of such tools to reach GPE goals in country. The goal is to move from the mere assessment of country public expenditures, procurement and financial accountability systems to a practical sequence of reform and capacity-building actions to encourage country ownership, reduce transaction costs, enhance donor harmonization and use of government systems, and better address fiduciary concerns.

5.4 In order to achieve these goals, there is a need for a wider availability of PEFA in GPE partner countries with a particular focus on the education sector. Because the PEFA process is not education sector specific, a specific strategy for better coordination and cross support is needed, that may include a specific vehicle to fund education sector specific PEFA assessments in a certain number of countries.

5.5 Timely reliable data is essential for effective monitoring of the implementation of education sector plans. Successful implementation of an education policy requires regular monitoring to ensure that activities are on track and to suggest adjustments when needed. After an analysis that indicated that most of the Education Sector Plans of GPE developing country partners were not adequately addressing monitoring, the Secretariat launched its Sector Monitoring Initiative in 2013 to provide additional support and increase the focus on ESP monitoring. Effective monitoring also requires reliable, timely data. The Secretariat’s 2013 Results for Learning Report⁵ shows that data availability is a very serious issue in GPE developing country partners. For data sets released in May 2013 of UNESCO Institute for Statistics (“UIS”), basic information for the school year 2011-12 like primary enrolment was available for only 17% of the GPE developing country partners. In order to complete the analysis for most of the countries, **it was necessary to use data that was already**

⁴ The Public Expenditures and Financial Accountability Program (“PEFA”) is aimed at “Improving Country Public Financial Management (“PFM”) System Performance for Strengthened Economic Growth and Government Services Delivery”. Its Secretariat is hosted by the World Bank in Washington.

⁵ Results for Learning Report 2013. Facing the Challenges of Data, Financing and Fragility. Forthcoming. The report will be available on the GPE website by the end of November 2013.

two years out of date (2010-11). The lack of timely reliable data is a clear impediment for an effective monitoring of the ESPs.

5.6 **The evaluation of education sector policies must be based on regular data.** Effective evaluation of the impact of education sector policies needs to track and understand gaps between targeted and actual results. This requires relevant reliable data provided on a regular basis. However, **too many GPE developing countries do not provide data on a regular basis to UIS.** Even considering data that is out of date by two years, the share of countries missing data on key education indicators (such as gross enrolment ratios, completion rates, etc.) is 21 percent for primary education, 28 percent for pre-primary education, and 34 percent for lower-secondary education.³ Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe do not have UIS data available for any indicators. The situation is even worse for financial data. Only 28 countries (of the 58 analyzed by the Global Partnership) report regularly on public expenditure on education. According to UIS, the rate of available key financial data is 54%. Of the 30 countries not providing regular data, fifteen countries do not report any information on public expenditure (see Chapter 5 of the GPE Results for Learning Report). The lack of credible data renders the evaluation of impact made by the Global Partnership very challenging, if not impossible.

The Issue of Learning Data

5.7 There is growing evidence that millions of children do not learn basic skills at school. According to estimates by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report,⁶ of the 180 million children in GPE developing country partners, only 80 million (44%) reach the 4th grade and learn the basic literacy and numeracy skills. Unfortunately, **the full extent of this learning crisis is not known due to the lack of reliable and regular data on learning outcomes in most countries.** Thus, it was not possible to provide comparable information in the GPE Results for Learning Report 2013 on general trends in learning in GPE developing country partners.⁷ Today, most of the GPE developing country partners do not have the data needed to effectively monitor learning outcomes.

⁶ Estimates provided by the GMR team to the GPE Secretariat.

⁷ The data available through national and international assessments are discussed in chapter 4 of the Results for Learning Report 2012 (GPE 2012e).

5.8 This lack of learning data is an impediment to evidence-based policy making. Therefore, there is an urgent need for robust data to understand the severity of the crisis, inform policy making and monitor progress over time.⁸

5.9 In response to this need, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution joined efforts to create a Learning Metrics Task Force (“LMTF”)⁹ to identify common learning goals to inform global development policy and improve learning outcomes. The Global Partnership (through its Secretariat and many Board members) is deeply involved in the initiative. On 25 September 2013, the LMTF presented its recommendations as a major contribution of the United Nations Secretary General’s Global Education First Initiative. The recommendations included: i) monitoring a small set of key learning indicators; ii) supporting countries in diagnosing the quality of their assessment systems; and iii) determining the technical and financial inputs required to improve measurement and learning outcomes.

5.10 The country support approach is well aligned with the GPE model, and this should allow synergies in the operational phase of the LMTF recommendations. In particular, the development of effective national learning assessment systems is critical and requires the full attention of the countries and their partners. The recent developments coming from the LMTF and the momentum created around learning represent a clear opportunity to move forward the learning agenda; and the Global Partnership should play a major role in this.

Data for monitoring and evaluation of GPE grants

5.11 The Global Partnership is interested in two broad categories of data: (i) the data related directly to the education sector; and (ii) the data necessary to assess the

⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. 2013. *Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force*.

⁹ The Learning Metrics Taskforce includes representatives of 30 organizations consisting of national and provincial governments, regional organizations, multilateral organizations, teachers’ organizations, civil society groups, and donor agencies.

effectiveness of GPE financial support, primarily program implementation grants which represent 95% of its funding. The remainder of this section focus on the data related to the grant process. The recently issued Portfolio Review and the Results for Learning Report have shown that the Global Partnership is also facing a real challenge with this category of data.

5.12 The Global Partnership needs much better information to monitor and assess its grants. For this information, it relies on the reporting of supervising and managing entities. With the expansion of SE/MEs, the Secretariat receives data in different reporting formats, which requires extensive work to consolidate and analyze. Further, the information provided is not always comparable from one organization to another, and sometimes within the same organization. Basic information needed to monitor outputs is often missing. In some cases, grant reporting is based on indicators such as gross enrolment ratio, which does not allow the monitoring of outputs.

5.13 The Portfolio Review¹⁰ gives a good overview of the challenges the Secretariat has faced in terms of reporting and monitoring GPE grants. The M&E team recently evaluated 29 closed grants to determine whether four basic data sets were available: (i) breakdown by activities; (ii) breakdown of activities by years; (iii) breakdown of cost by activities; and (iv) unit costs of activities. On average, information was provided for only one of the four categories. Only one grant provided the four categories of data; four grants did not provide any of the data at all. Only two grants provided the breakdown of activities by year, and only one grant provided information on unit costs. Simply put, **the lack of such basic information in the reporting of closed grants does not allow for an adequate (let alone rigorous) assessment of the performance of GPE grants.**

5.14 However, as mentioned in the Portfolio Review, due consideration needs to be given to the trade-off between additional requirements for SE/MEs and government partners on the one hand, and promoting greater harmonization and alignment on the other.

5.15 As a final observation, **the current reporting focuses on the project-related performance but does not pay enough attention to the broader**

¹⁰ GPE Portfolio Review Report 2013.

education sector and ESP implementation. Information around harmonization, alignment, and ESP monitoring is very limited in the current reporting. Ideally, reporting would allow grant results to be linked to broader sector outcomes including a consideration of the impact of the choice of funding modality.

6. THE WAY FORWARD: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO DATA

6.1 The current situation in terms of data is both an impediment for education progress in developing country partners and for effective support by the Global Partnership. Thus, there is a clear and urgent need for action. The GPE model can provide strong support and incentives to improve education data and the use of evidence in the education sector. The first step is to ensure that there is a clear and systematic focus on data and evidence through the GPE country process.

6.2 **The Global Partnership can better support evidence-based policies.** An in-depth diagnosis of the education sector is critical to ensure an evidence-based policy process. The Global Partnership should provide more support to education sector analysis by increasing the amount of the Education Plan Development Grant in order to finance proper sector analysis, and also by monitoring the quality of analytical work. In addition, the availability of a recent education sector analysis should be considered as a critical element of the development of an ESP and, thus, should be part of the application for GPE financing.¹¹

6.3 **The Global Partnership can adopt a more proactive approach to public finance management issues** to accelerate capacity building and move to more aligned modalities as a partnership. This means wider availability and better targeting of the education sector in public expenditures and financial accountability assessments, as well as more targeted capacity building components of education sector plans and GPE partners' support.

¹¹ For fragile and conflict affected countries (FCACs) a specific approach is recommended. It is proposed that, as part of their transitional education plans supported by GPE, FCACs undertake an education sector analysis.

6.4 GPE country support should systematically address data issues. Advocating for greater availability of data, and the communication of such data to UIS, should be systematically part of the GPE Country Support Team’s work in the field.

6.5 The lack of timely, reliable data needs to be identified and addressed through GPE processes. Countries which do not have timely, reliable data should prioritize the issue and be able to benefit from the financial support of the Global Partnership, if needed. While such support is already possible in some cases and some GPE grants do finance strengthening education management and information systems (“EMIS”), there is no systematic approach to the data issue. That said, the GPE process should not duplicate the work of partners and should also encourage the communication of data to the UIS given its critical role for the monitoring of education progress globally.

6.6 The same approach should be considered for learning data. The development and/or improvement of national learning assessment systems should be a priority, as recommended by the Learning Metrics Task Force. When learning data are not available regularly or reliably, countries should be able to benefit from GPE financial support to further develop their learning assessment systems.

6.7 GPE’s country engagement and grant-making could be used to help our country partners bring about significant improvements in the availability, timeliness, reliability, and relevance of data. Clearly more work is needed to flesh out what this means in practice, including looking at changes to the GPE grant-making requirements. This is linked to recommendations from the FAC to the Board of Directors on changes to the indicative allocations process. It is expected that concrete proposals would be available to the Board of Directors in the spring of 2014.

6.8 Revised data requirements for GPE grants are needed. The current level of information about GPE grants does not support an evidence-based decision-making process. The current limitations suggest adopting a revised set of minimum standard data requirements for all GPE grants. Due consideration is needed around the trade-off between additional requirements for SE/MEs and government partners on the one hand, and promoting greater harmonization and alignment on the other. Further work is needed to identify options and trade-offs.

6.9 In sum, poor data in the education sector will undermine the achievement of better outcomes both at the sector level and with regard to the effectiveness of GPE support. This is a critical challenge for the partnership in the coming years. More incentives and support are needed to lead to any meaningful progress. The strategy proposed in this paper will support a greater focus on data within the partnership and facilitate the development of appropriate policies.

6.10 The proposed strategy requires reconsidering the indicators for the strategic plan for essentially two reasons.

- i. The Global Partnership needs to take into account the work of the Learning Metrics Task Force and adopt the LMTF indicators and promulgate them. This would address Strategic Goals 2 (learning), 3 (equity), and 4 (systems building).
- ii. The proposed data strategy leads to a sequenced approach as some indicators can be tracked quickly when others will require more time. In the short term, it will be possible to report on the standard indicators already in the Strategic Plan such as Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), completion rate, gender index (Strategic Goals 1 (access) and 3 (equity)). More time will be needed for the learning indicators coming from the ongoing work of the LMTF, but also for indicators that could be provided by education sector analyses.

6.11 Further work is needed on indicators. It is a process linked to the progress in terms of data. Thus, progress on data and indicators should be reviewed on a regular basis and specific action on further improvements on indicators to be determined.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR SECRETARIAT RESOURCES

All of the upcoming work on developing some of the operational aspects of this data strategy can be met within the Secretariat resource envelope contained in BOD/2013/11 DOC 11 (Secretariat Budget and Work Plan for 2014).

8. NEXT STEPS

Following approval by the Board of Directors, the Secretariat will:

- Update the country level process guide to reflect a strengthened focus on data by March 2014;

- Develop a proposal for financing education sector analysis by the end of February 2014;
- Develop a proposal for financing education sector specific public expenditures and financial accountability assessments by the end of February 2014;
- Revise the guidelines of the program implementation grant in order to ensure that the data issue is addressed in the application by March 2014;
- Develop the minimum requirements for monitoring and evaluation of program implementation grants by March 2014;
- Update the indicators for the strategic plan based on the data strategy by March 2014; and
- Connect the data strategy with the ongoing work on innovation in the Global Partnership.