2014 CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEW

Executive Summary
Executive Summary

As part of its ongoing work to improve the level and quality of civil society organization (CSO) engagement in the Global Partnership for Education (Global Partnership or GPE)\(^1\), the Secretariat has undertaken this review of civil society participation in global and national policy processes. This 2014 Civil Society Review examines both documentation and feedback from partners (from interviews and surveys) to determine the major achievements of the past five years and the extent to which various factors have supported or hindered civil society stakeholders’ effective participation in the GPE Board of Directors (Board) policy work and in the work of Local Education Groups (LEGs).

This review thus functions as a resource to help the GPE Secretariat and its partners develop strategies to better tackle some of the obstacles to effective and meaningful CSO participation. The findings of the review will help to inform the design of GPE’s financing of civil society through the Civil Society Education Fund, which currently provides grant funding to global, regional and national civil society networks engaged in advocacy and oversight in education. The findings will also inform the work and policies of the Board and Secretariat and their efforts to enhance the engagement of civil society constituency members in GPE’s work.

The review is organized into two sections. The first section assesses the accomplishments, enabling factors and challenges to civil society participation in the GPE Board and global policy dialogue. It also identifies a range of recommendations for the GPE Board, Secretariat and for civil society to address these challenges going forward. Secondly, the review discusses the major accomplishments, enabling factors and challenges to civil society participation in national level policy dialogue, including in the work of LEGs. It then identifies recommendations for the Secretariat, Board and for GPE’s funding for civil society, to help increase the level of engagement of civil society in national level policy processes.

Civil society engagement at the global level

The major achievement of the past five years, as highlighted in interviews, surveys and the literature, was the shift in the role of civil society from primarily service delivery to a policy dialogue actor as well. Civil society is generally perceived as key in terms of bringing the voice of affected populations into policy debates and holding governments accountable on their obligation to fulfil the right to education. Civil society representatives on the Global Partnership Board and Committees generally experience a large space for dialogue and influence on policy decisions, and other Board members also express that there is a good and constructive dialogue with civil society representatives.

Enabling factors include support from the GPE Secretariat which has dedicated more staff time to support civil society constituencies, and in particular through the Secretariat’s increased collaboration with civil society on the recent

---

\(^1\)Civil Society Engagement Strategy, BOD/2013/11 Doc 05, Global Partnership for Education, November 2013
Replenishment Campaign. Civil society has likewise improved the depth and breadth of its policy engagement with the Global Partnership for Education at the global level, significantly enabled by support from regional networks, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and its members. This support has helped to facilitate better global-national links and increased the level of engagement of individual organizations which have dedicated more staff time to GPE-related policy work.

However, some factors were also identified as hindering effective civil society participation in the Global Partnerships global policy dialogue. The evidence pointed to several aspects of communication which have posed challenges to effective participation, including language barriers, ad hoc internal consultation practices among the civil society board constituencies, and inconsistent communication from the GPE Secretariat. The lack of resources, capacity and support for consultation on and coordination of constituency positions have prevented CSO Board representatives from developing consultative positions that are well informed by the input of national civil society networks and teachers’ unions. Lack of funding for preparatory meetings, teleconferences and feedback mechanisms for board meetings, as well as a lack of understanding by national and regional networks of GPE processes, have contributed to weak constituency representation. Further feedback from partners also identified a need for more representation of certain stakeholders who should be more prominently represented in GPE’s global policy dialogue, such as children, youth, parents and other disadvantaged groups. Some feedback also identified the risk that donor Board members hold more weight in the GPE Board policy dialogue than other partners.

**Civil society engagement at the national level**

The evidence pointed to four major achievements in terms of civil society participation in national policy dialogue, including increased: 1) influence on policy, 2) engagement in Local Education Groups, 3) social mobilization and 4) policy analysis and research. Over the past five years, civil society – represented through national coalitions – has increased its influence on policy decisions in a number of GPE developing partner countries.

Increasingly, proposals, suggested legislation and analyses from national civil society actors are being taken into account by education policy makers. This is also evident in the increasing number of Local Education Groups which have civil society members, and their increased participation in working groups and other thematic education policy processes facilitated by the Local Education Group. In addition, progress reports from the past five years show a steady increase in the scale of social mobilization being carried out – both geographically and in terms of numbers of citizens, media hits and community events organized. This is coupled with a growing use of strategic research and policy analyses, which civil society is increasingly bringing to bear on the national education challenges.

Factors that enabled these achievements include the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) funding and structure, which has been a key support for civil society participation at national level. It has helped to both organize the representation of civil society as a collective and
to enable coalitions to be seen as credible actors by development partners and governments. The GCE, its regional networks and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have also played an enabling factor to support national level participation. Finally, the improvements made to the current phase of CSEF are perceived positively as having led to more strategic and effective support for civil society at the national level, for example from a clearer governance structure, more support from INGOs and an increased emphasis on cross-network learning.

However, some constraints have been identified as preventing the full participation of civil society in national level education policy processes. These hindering factors for effective participation at the national level include both external factors and internal factors. External constraints on civil society participation include governments’ unwillingness to engage with civil society groups, (particularly in situations of conflict and fragility), as well as the perception that LEG members do not always proactively enable effective civil society participation and are often variable in their function, purpose and membership. Additionally, the GPE Secretariat has not systematically intervened to support their increased participation in LEGs due to both lack of awareness and capacity constraints.

Other external constraints include delays in the disbursement of CSEF funding, leading to reduced impact of the program and the consequent loss of staff and capacity. The complexity of arrangements with Supervising Entities (SEs) for the CSEF has also posed challenges for the effective and timely roll-out of CSEF activities.

Some of the internal factors which were found to hinder the participation of civil society in national policy processes include the regional variation in management, capacity and governance, with particular concerns about the ability of the African regional network to effectively implement the CSEF. The issue cited most frequently in the survey by respondents was the lack of adequate capacity among national civil society actors. Issue areas identified as requiring capacity support include capacity to undertake monitoring and policy analysis, and in certain areas such as TVET, quality, retention and transition, education financing, budget analysis and tracking, global education policy issues, the Global Partnership and LEG processes, teacher issues, inclusive and girls’ education. The GCE was found to have delayed its implementation of the Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation initiative to tap into the expertise and cross-learning among its membership, which may be a factor in the continuing high demand for capacity support.

At the national level, the perceived exclusion of some voices from the national civil society was seen as an issue, where coalitions may not be able to effectively represent the diversity of its members, its membership may be lacking important groups or groups may not feel that coalitions are appropriate vehicles to represent their interests.

The following recommendations represent a synthesis from the findings of the Secretariat’s investigation on the nature of the Global Partnership’s support for civil society. The recommendations include suggested reforms to the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) to improve the program as well as actions that the Global Partnership Secretariat and its partners could take to improve its operations and better support the full participation of civil society in
education policy dialogue. These recommendations provide a starting point for discussions among GPE Secretariat staff, board, partners, and civil society to determine potential strategies moving forward.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE GLOBAL LEVEL PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

| **The GPE Board of Directors should:** | • Review the GPE’s language policy and work to ensure more documentation/translation is available in languages other than French and English.  
• Provide clear guidance on the policy for Board observers and ensure allowance of civil society observers, particularly for disadvantaged or excluded CSO constituency groups such as children, youth, parents, people with disabilities, etc.  
• Assess the potential to increase the formal representation of children and youth on the GPE Board of Directors, including through with children and youth stakeholder groups. |
| **The GPE Secretariat should:** | • Ensure documents in languages other than English are shared in a timely manner to allow for advance consultation.  
• Share Board information in user-friendly formats, including short summaries with highlights of the main points for easier comprehension by civil society.  
• Share regular updates with all civil society stakeholders via a mailing list on all major events, policy developments and news.  
• Increase Secretariat capacity to support civil society representation at global level, including through stronger and consistent communication, procedures and outreach. |
| **Civil Society should:** | • Strengthen consultation within CSO 1, CSO 2 and CSO 3 constituency members in advance of Board and sub-committee meetings, including more regular updates and more systematic consultation processes.  
• Dedicate organizational resources (including through the CSEF) for support to the CSO Board members, including capacity support to coordinate and organize preparatory meetings and to subsidize travel for CSO1 Board members.  
• Allocate dedicated regional focal points to support consultation and engagement of national members to feed into Board discussions.  
• Provide capacity building to regional and national members to strengthen awareness of GPE, its role and relevance in global policy processes. |
## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE NATIONAL LEVEL PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

### The GPE Secretariat should:
- Develop stronger operational links between the Secretariat and the CSEF and EI Teachers Program, including through greater collaboration to engage and support civil society (for e.g. in capacity building, national civil society grant applications, strategy development, country missions, joint monitoring of participation, conferences and events, etc.)
- Improve transparency through opportunities for civil society participation including workshops, country missions, GPE funding applications, sector reviews, or other relevant policy arenas.
- Develop minimum standards on civil society participation (in LEGs, sector processes and GPE grant processes), including standard procedures, template MOUs, and checklists to assess civil society engagement in LEGs, and explore the introduction of clearer conditionalities.
- Provide capacity building and sensitization to LEG members, including governments, supervising agencies and coordinating agencies, on GPE’s civil society policies.
- Intervene with governments or other partners which are reticent to engage civil society.
- Ensure that LEGs are reinforcing other national democratic processes including public debate, parliament, or other national policy discussions.
- Promote consultation with youth, parents, and other disadvantaged groups and the use of data from these perspectives in the review and reform of education policies.

### The GPE Board of Directors should:
- Continue to resource civil society participation, particularly through the CSEF, and review ways in which it can enhance the role of teachers in national policy dialogue. Ensure funding for the CSEF is provided over a sufficient period of time to achieve results (e.g. 3 to 4 years), is disbursed annually under predictable procedures, and does not risk disruptive breaks in funding.
- Ensure adequate allocation of CSEF resources to support consultation and coordination of constituency positions, including additional resources for the global and regional capacities to support national capacities for engagement.
- Assess areas for increased civil society engagement requiring further financial support outside of the CSEF and EI Teachers’ Program, particularly relating to the next GPE Strategic Plan.

### The CSEF should:
- Increase the capacity of global and regional Secretariats in order to provide expanded support for Board constituency communication, coordination and preparation.
- Provide dedicated staff time, capacity efforts, and joint support with expert organizations for civil society operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- Provide greater latitude for eligibility for CSEF grants, and for coalition or network structures to enable context-sensitive approaches.
- Increase focus on strengthening learning, monitoring and evaluation to better leverage cross-national and cross-regional experiences.
- Increase support for the collection and use of data from school and community levels.
- Develop strategies to better include traditionally marginalized groups in national policy dialogue and CSEF activities, and improve monitoring of for e.g. out of school youth, parents, children with disabilities, etc.