



Advocacy and Social Accountability (ASA) Consultation Summary

1. Background and process

1.1 As part of the process for designing the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) new Advocacy and Social Accountability funding mechanism, the Secretariat organised consultations with various constituencies within the partnership (Developing Country Partners, Civil Society Organisations, Bilateral Donors, International Organizations, Foundations) between July and November 2017. This Consultation Summary has been prepared by the Strategy, Policy and Performance team at the Secretariat to disseminate the key findings of this consultation, which have significantly guided the thinking behind the design of the ASA mechanism.

1.2 The consultation was comprised of consultation webinars with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), a day-long workshop with Developing Country Partners (DCPs), one-on-one interviews with members of the Strategy and Impact Committee who are overseeing the development of the design process for the ASA mechanism and represented the views of their respective constituencies after consulting with them, and interviews with implementers in the sector within the partnership.

1.3 The greatest proportion of input came from Civil Society Organizations through consultation webinars in English, French, and Spanish. Representatives from over 50 organizations participated in these webinars.

1.4 In addition to consultations across the partnership, the Secretariat also reached out to experts from the fields of advocacy and social accountability, henceforth referred to as 'experts'. Several experts from academia and international non-governmental organizations provided valuable insights on the role of civil society, best practice within the sector, as well as on GPE's comparative advantage, in this relatively-new area of work.

1.5 The purpose of the consultations was to gather inputs and feedback on a range of questions as relevant to each constituency. The following questions were common across stakeholders:

- Given the size of this new funding mechanism, how can the overall mechanism and corresponding windows (now objectives) be additive / complementary to what exists in the field? How can GPE be catalytic and game changing?
- What practical advice would you offer as we think about the design and operations of this mechanism?

Summary of Consultation Participants (by constituency)

Constituency	Number of participants	Mode of engagement
Developing Country Partners	14	Workshop and webinar
Civil Society Organisations	50	Webinars
Foundations	9	Interviews
Experts and Implementers	14	Interviews
Bilateral donors	4	Interviews
International organisations	4	Interviews

**Number of participants consulted per constituency is approximate.*

2. Key findings from the consultation

2.1 Summary of key findings

Overall, partners welcomed GPE's intention to strengthen and diversify its investments in the civil society and social accountability space. Developing Country Partners (DCPs) emphasized the important role of civil society in providing oversight, supporting the engagement of citizens in education policy, and bringing the expertise and views of local communities to bear on education policy – but also acknowledged the challenges of achieving constructive and streamlined engagement with civil society. Civil society affirmed the value of the Civil Society Education Fund, and in particular of the role of the Global Campaign for Education and regional secretariats in supporting national coalitions' activities. Bilateral partners emphasized the importance of civil society efforts to increase transparency and improve governance, and this was reinforced by foundations and DCP inputs. Foundations emphasized the importance of allowing for an iterative process in advocacy and social accountability activities, by supporting learning and adaptation over multi-year periods. Partners identified strong linkages between the new Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) and ASA as an important approach to embedding learning into the ASA grants, activities and capacity building for grantees.

As the ASA design was still at an early stage, the consultations primarily focused on key design principles that should inform the mechanism; however, some consulted partners and stakeholders were also able to provide insights on design considerations and operational principles based on their experiences.

The key findings from the consultations are summarised below:

2.2 GPE's comparative advantage

Important input was solicited during the consultation was around GPE's comparative advantage. There was strong consensus from all partners and informants that GPE is well positioned to help ensure that accountability efforts inform national policy and planning cycles, including through GPE's support for government-led education strategies for systems' change and inclusive joint monitoring at the country level.

- There was a constituency-wide consensus on GPE's comparative advantage being its sectoral focus and its ability to integrate a focus on social accountability within national education policy and implementation processes.
- Foundations noted that the main promise of this new mechanism lay in generating capacity which could lead to empowered communities, and in both constructive and confrontative engagement around how public financing could be used for education. Foundations constituents also reflected that GPE's comparative advantage was that the ASA mechanism would be built into GPE's core architecture, as it has consciously decided to embed Civil Society Organizations' participation into education policy processes.
- Civil society partners perceived GPE as a legitimate platform to bring different partners together, and expressed that its partnership structure combined with its deep resource base and competent staff could potentially give it legitimacy to overhaul and redefine social norms.
- Donors saw ASA as key to effective delivery of the country-level model, and an opportunity for a fundamental shift in how GPE fulfils its role. For example, ASA could enable GPE's country support teams to think creatively about their work across countries, and how social accountability and advocacy components could be built in at GPE's country-level work. Further, ASA could also provide GPE an opportunity to build on its prior work around participatory policy making by further strengthening Local Education Groups and ensuring that they truly represented civil society, including teacher unions.

2.3 Role of civil society in education policy

Partners highlighted the role of civil society in working towards increased accountability as well as in advocacy to improve public systems and services, especially given their access and trusted relationships with communities. However, some partners noted that this opportunity had not yet been leveraged to the fullest, and welcomed the potential for ASA to further strengthen civil society.

- Developing Country Partners highlighted that civil society organizations are able to advocate where government officials cannot, and this advocacy role has in many cases been underutilized so far.

- DCPs mentioned that civil society could particularly add value to Joint Sector Reviews, by independently evaluating education systems through field visits, validating school leadership, and coordinating civil society action with governments. Through its relationship of trust with communities, civil society could also play a role in helping to develop and disseminate Education Sector Plans and policies at the community level.
- While acknowledging the opportunities for meaningful civil society engagement, DCPs also expressed certain concerns. They mentioned that some civil society organisations often focused on merely criticising the government, rather than collaboratively working with policy makers to improve educational outcomes. Civil society should consider how it could play a more constructive role in working with governments on monitoring and reporting to improve national education systems.
- They also highlighted the need for civil society organisations to practice themselves the principles of transparency and accountability.
- Bilateral partners also emphasized the importance of civil society efforts to increase transparency and improve governance, and this was reinforced by foundations and DCP inputs.

2.4 Coalitions: opportunities and challenges

While partners acknowledged the impact of GPE's support to national coalitions through the Civil Society Education Fund thus far, some partners also highlighted a number of challenges facing coalitions, particularly in the areas of representative and inclusive practice.

- Civil society affirmed the value of the Civil Society Education Fund, and in particular of the role of the Global Campaign for Education and regional secretariats in supporting national coalitions' activities.
- Foundations and some civil society informants expressed that there are legitimate but small-scale actors who aren't able to access the policy space through the existing structure of the Global Campaign for Education and other mechanisms supported through the Civil Society Education Fund. On the other hand, a lot of grassroots organizations have refrained from joining CSEF-supported coalitions because of the political implications, but foundations noted that an integral component of social accountability is supporting the growth of these small community-based organizations since they can truly bring the indigenous voice to the discourse (as opposed to large international non-governmental organizations).
- Experts elaborated that some CSEF-supported coalitions haven't been allowed to fail and pivot in order to be able to respond to contextual changes and challenges. Further, many coalitions have continued to have the same leadership and Boards since their establishment, and thus, the decision makers haven't become more representative and inclusive over time.

2.5 Policy priorities for ASA

This component of the consultation focussed on understanding what pressing policy challenges could be impacted by greater social accountability efforts to leverage change in education. Experts also encouraged

GPE to think beyond national policy and assess the implementation of policies, because even strong policies have failed to deliver due to implementation challenges and siphoning off of resources.

2.5.1 Equity and inclusion

The need to focus on equity and inclusion was echoed across constituencies. Equity and inclusion were highlighted as both an end goal that ASA could strive toward in order to achieve better educational outcomes, as well as a necessary condition to revitalize the civic movement to make it more representative and diverse.

- Civil society partners felt that the new ASA mechanism could focus on issues of equity that have been deprioritized so far especially in national education policy processes. For example, there has been a lack of focus on disability and inclusion within national coalitions' agendas, and the potential to bring in diverse actors and expertise beyond national coalitions through ASA provided a great opportunity to address this shortcoming.
- Experts also highlighted the opportunity to accelerate action for those left behind and drive policy discussions in the direction of greater equity.
- Further, through ASA, GPE could include other non-conventional active networks such as slum dweller networks, agro-pastoral networks etc. for a more vitalized civic movement as well as for a more representative and inclusive accountability and advocacy agenda. Another group that could be supported through this mechanism is youth through young people's development as advocates at the national and global level.
- Foundations opined that education reform processes are often not accountable to the base, and don't resonate with people on the ground. More inclusive civil society participation can emerge from engaging and building an indigenous civil society all the way to the GPE Board.
- DCPs expressed their concerns around the challenge of creating a truly inclusive platform that represents the diversity and varied interests of civil society actors, including actors such as parents' association that might not have the same level of access and information as other well-funded organizations.
- Similarly, international organizations constituents highlighted that the more GPE could do to ensure a diversified voice in formalized processes, the better that would be, as often, social accountability interventions can be of a short-term nature and highly dependent on government allies. By diversifying the actors actively engaging in formal policy processes, this would ensure policy making that was not only more participatory but also more sustainable.

2.5.2 From data to action

Across constituencies, partners and experts highlighted the importance of focussing on linking data and research i.e. transparency, to action and advocacy to improve public services, given the evidence that monitoring alone hasn't necessarily led to better outcomes in the past.

- Foundations emphasized that while there is a need to focus on evidence, it is also imperative to consider how the process of creating and mobilizing evidence can effectively allow the voice of people to inform the development agenda.
- Developing Country Partners flagged that there has been a lot of emphasis on producing research and reports but not enough on using this research to inform advocacy at the national or global level. For e.g. in many cases, civil society organizations did not share valuable insights from their research with governments that could have used the inputs to inform budgets or strategic plans.
- Experts highlighted that while citizen-led assessments had proven to be quite effective in generating information, very few initiatives have gone from knowledge to action, and this is a huge gap that needs to be bridged. They emphasized that merely making information available is not enough, and the key is to realize how to turn available information into strategic action.
- Experts mentioned that an increased focus on availability of data would certainly increase transparency; however, at some point, there is a risk that this increased transparency would become the new normal, without actually resulting in increased citizen engagement or improved public services that can be explicitly linked to the generation and utilization of information by citizens. Thus, one of the risks of transparency initiatives without a clear plan or theory of change is that not only does more information come to light, but also that it could delegitimize the importance of transparency. This has also emerged as one of the risks of citizen-led assessments.

2.5.3 Mobilising pre-existing momentum

Partners recommended that GPE work with already mobilized and enthusiastic partners as from their experience, work is more effective where there is already momentum (coalitions of the willing). This was a recurrent recommendation that emerged across civil society organizations, foundations and implementers. There was also an emphasis on the importance of national and global coalitions collaboratively identifying priorities and program objectives with local organizations at the grassroots level, thus also bridging the (sometimes) false dichotomy between national and local organizations.

- Foundations highlighted that the social accountability agenda had to start with focussing on what people already cared about to get people into the habit of observing what governments are doing. They highlighted that it is easy to build on enthusiasm that already exists and easy to get work done when people are already excited about it, so it is more effective to go for the 'low-hanging fruit' and build structures around areas where there is existing momentum. This would be exciting because it would achieve success in a short-period of time, and then turn into a virtuous cycle, thus leading to long-term success.
- Similarly, experts highlighted that accountability work started in a lot of countries with civil society based in capitals and staffed by elites. Thus, national debates may not reflect local issues or may not be things that communities were truly interested in or able to continue working on. Thus, it was important to focus on the types of problems communities might choose to tackle when given the space supported by motivated people.

- The fact that communities are taking action as compared to merely being the source of information, would also allow communities to demand that national civil society organizations are using the information, thus making it a collaborative rather than extractive relationship.

2.6 Approaches to learning

Overall, partners strongly recommended embedding learning within ASA from the conception phase itself. Supporting learning and adaptation over multi-year periods would also allow for an iterative process in GPE's advocacy and social accountability activities.

- Experts highlighted the need to ensure that learning investments intentionally reach all targets of the learning strategy, including actors that are actively implementing programs, and not be restricted to directors and other managing actors, as is often the case. They stressed that it is equally important to connect strategists and implementers for horizontal learning and exchange.
- They stressed the need to elevate southern partners such as think tanks based in-country as well as universities within the context of learning. They also stressed the need to promote capacity building through a south-south exchange. Working with a research partner based in-country would also facilitate tighter linkages between local researchers and policymakers.
- Experts highlighted the challenges of building a learning platform in a way that people will use it effectively and not just view it as a burden in addition to the regular reporting and evaluation responsibilities.
- Further, across constituencies, partners identified leveraging strong linkages between KIX and ASA as an important approach to embedding learning into the ASA grants, activities and capacity building for grantees.

2.7 Sustainability and long-term impact

On sustainability, the key idea that emerged was that GPE would have to pay attention to design the ASA mechanism in such a way that it could transfer ownership to the national government and citizens after the grant cycle ended, and focus on making it more institutionalized and not subject to a leader or project.

- Experts highlighted that social accountability involves behaviour change and traditionally, organizations have tended to focus only on short-term involvement at the community level. They flagged the importance of building in a sustainability plan from early stages of the ASA mechanism, while co-creating an impact matrix with short, mid, and long term indicators, with inputs from communities.
- Similarly, they highlighted that measuring behavioural change meant that it was necessary to go back to affected communities a few years later and this never really happens in most programs. Thus, it is important to adopt at least a medium-term view and not merely a short-term view to measure success.

3. Conclusion and next steps

Guided by the inputs received through the consultation process, the Secretariat presented key design parameters for deliberation to the Strategy and Impact Committee at its meetings in Copenhagen on September 26-27, 2017, and Paris on October 24-25. The Committee will now be recommending certain design decisions to the Board for its endorsement in December, and further work on ASA will be carried out in alignment with the Board's decisions.